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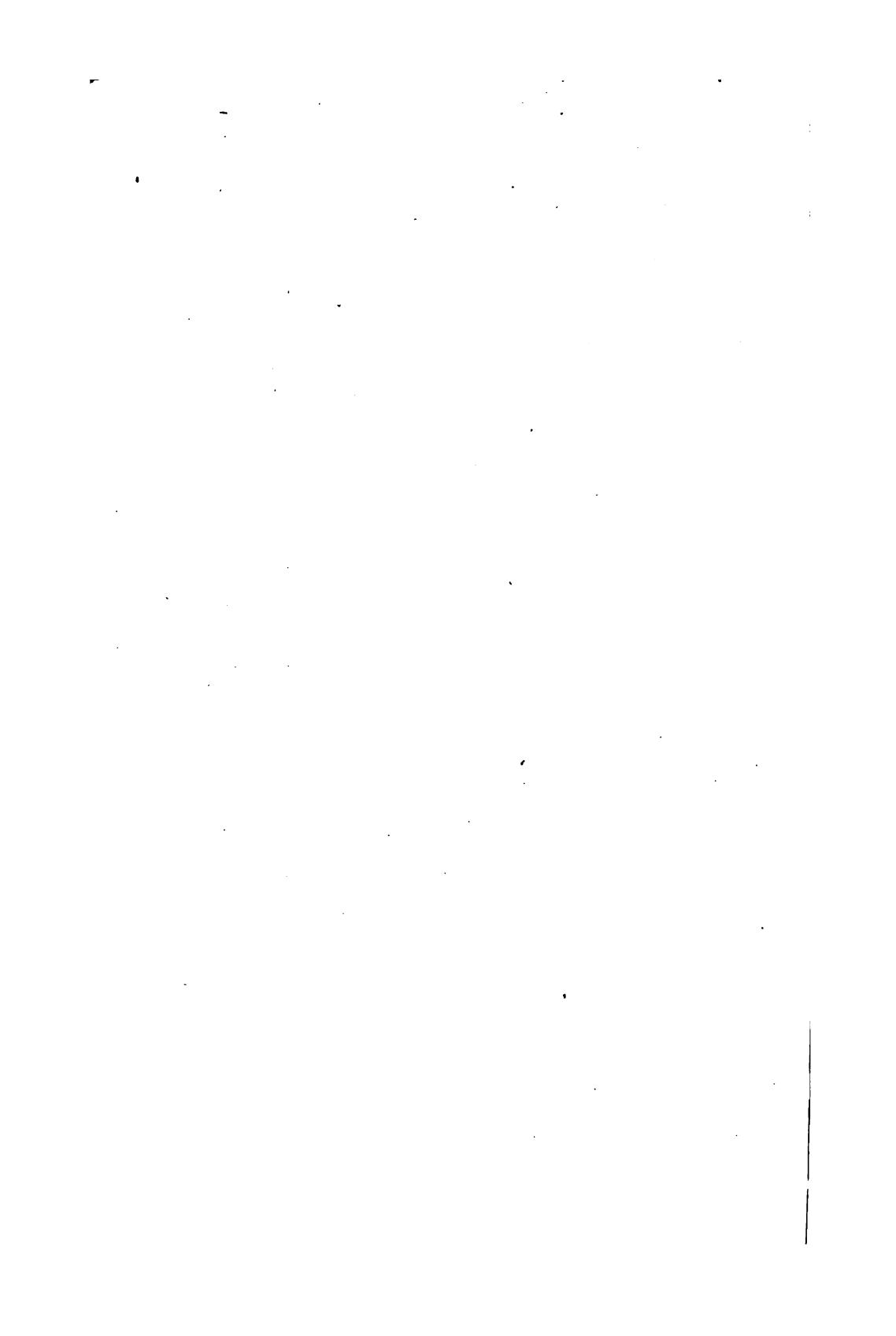
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NED LOCKSLEY,

THE ETONIAN;

OR,

THE ONLY SON.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

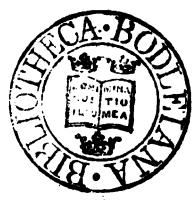


LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1863.

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~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

NED LOCKSLEY, THE ETONIAN.

CHAPTER I.

"**C**APITAL! But it wasn't on a live boy's head, though?"

"What odds if it had been?"

"All the odds in the world, Ned. Funk makes a fellow's hand shake."

"Stop a bit, then, and I'll try again with Tommy Wilmot. Here! Tommy! Tommy!"

But when it was explained to Tommy, the gardener's son, that he was to stand blindfold whilst Master Locksley shot a bolt at an apple on his head, he manifested an unaccountable repugnance. In vain was he shown two apples spitted in succession by the marksman's skill: in vain was he made acquainted with the story of the gallant Switzer's

boy: in vain was an offer made to dispense with the brass ferule on the bolt.

Then bribes were tried, a new sixpence and a bag of marbles. Then came hard words: "he was a muff;" "he was a monkey." Lastly, I am sorry to say, came threats, whereat he threw himself upon his back on the turf, kicking and screaming for "Mammy!"

"Ugh! the little toad!" said both his tormentors, with the most ingenuous indignation.

"I have it, though," said the Earl, after a pause. "Let's get Mrs. Locksley's big china jar out of the back drawing-room, stick it on a stool with the apple atop. It's no end of funky to shoot at."

It was indeed. Even Ned's recklessness quailed.

"A nice boy you are," quoth his lordship; "risk Tommy Wilmot's life or eyes and funk the crockery! Well!"

This was more than Ned could stand. Indoors he went, and brought out the jar in one hand, a tall stool in the other. On the lid squatted a grinning dragon with a smooth round pate. Thereon a pippin was then craftily poised, and the Earl stepped off the distance at which they had been shooting before. Their weapon was a cross-bow, their bolt of wood tipped with a brass ferule.

Ned took aim so steadily that his companion

muttered, "He'll do it, now." So, perhaps, he would, but for a saucy may-fly and a hungry swallow. The may-fly danced right in the line of aim ; the swallow darted, snapped at and seized her. The gleam of the bird's glossy back dazzled Ned's eye too late to check the finger on the trigger.

Off went the head of the golden dragon of the dynasty of Ming.

"Oh, Ned, Ned, we've been and done it," was the Earl's generous exclamation.

"I've been and done it, not you, Phil!" was Ned's no less generous disclaimer.

"I put you up to it, and bullied you into it, so the mischief's mine as much as yours : and that I'll stick to. But talk of sticking, Ned, couldn't we stick the vile brute's head on again?" said Philip, transferring, as we all do sometimes, a share of his annoyance to the victim of his misdeed.

"Perhaps we could," answered the marksman, ruefully. "It's a good job it wasn't Tommy's eye."

"That's the provoking part of it ; the obstinate little toad will think he was right to refuse. What are you going for now, 'Ned ?'

"Only the cement bottle in mammy's cupboard."

Very good cement it was ; and, soon set hard, the Ming monster showed his grinders as well as ever. The ingenious Earl bethought him of some

gold shell in Ned's paint-box, and dapping therewith the line of fracture made it almost disappear.

"Repairs neatly done gratis for parties finding their own cement. The jar's as good as ever, Ned, put it away and there's an end of it."

Not so, Ned's uncompromising honesty would not allow it. His father soon after came up the lawn, where the boys were still lounging under the cedars. At his approach, Tommy Wilmot, who was hovering about, took to speedy flight. Who could say but some vague charge of complicity might affect and endanger him? The Earl, who was peeling a willow wand, was rather startled at hearing Ned begin—

"Papa, dear, I've been and done it again."

"More mischief, Ned?" asked Mr. Locksley, laying his hand upon the curly head, and looking down into the boyish eyes which sought his in perfect confidence.

"Yes. You know mammy's big china jar. It's a mercy it ain't atoms, I can tell you. But I knocked the monster's head off with a cross-bolt."

"Accident on purpose, Ned? That makes all the difference you know."

"Well, I shot at it on purpose, but cut the dragon off by accident," and Ned's look drooped at remembering the wantonness of his exploit.

"I haven't time to hear it out just now, Ned ; you must tell me in my study after tea. Lady Cransdale wants you both up at the House. She told me to send you if I came across you, so be off at once."

As they went along, Philip asked of the other :

"Do you always tell him things straight out that way, Ned?"

"To be sure I do. Don't you tell Lady Cransdale every thing?"

"Well, I do sometimes. Constance does always. But I say, Ned, will there be much row about this vile beast of a griffin?"

"You're hard on the poor griffin, Phil. He didn't ask to be shot at, yet he didn't object like Tommy."

"Well, but what will your father do to you for breaking him?"

"Not knowing can't say. But if I catch it, it's a case of serve me right. The jar is mammy's and she'd have been monstrous sorry to have it smashed. Holloa ! what's that ? Your mother and Lady Constance on the walk, with the new pony ! Cut along, Phil, and bother the griffin till after tea!"

In two minutes more they were up to the Countess and her daughter with a rush and a shout which set the pony plunging.

"Isn't he too spirited, Con?" said Lady Cransdale.
"One of the boys had better ride him first."

"Oh, please no, dear mamma. I like spirit in a pony. He's gentle enough with it, I'm sure."

She stepped up to the startled creature which eyed her with its large, deer-like eyes, and with quivering nostril sniffed at her outstretched hand. Then, as if reassured by her gentleness and fearlessness together, it stood quite still and suffered her to pat its crested neck.

"There now, mamma dear,' Selim and I are friends for good and all. Do let me have the saddle on. It's only three o'clock, and the boys' half holiday; we could have such a canter. Do, there's a dear!"

"Then James must go, too. I can't trust you with the boys alone the first time."

Old James, the head groom, touched his hat.

"I'd better ride the old brown hunter, my lady, he's as steady as a house."

No wonder that Lady Constance had both frame and face instinct with grace and beauty, for all she were as yet a wild slip of a girl. For she was daughter to that beautiful and stately mother, whose motherly beauty widowhood had saddened into a sweet serenity owning a special loveliness.

The children ran in at open windows on the

ground floor. Lady Cransdale mounted the terrace steps. There was a marble vase upon the balustrade, with heavy handles. Clasping one of these with both her hands, she leant her cheek upon them, and looked out wistfully, first upon the landscape, then heavenward.

"Ah, Philip dear," she sighed, "I wonder can you see the children now? Do you still halve the care of them with me?"

By-and-by the trample of skittish hoofs was heard upon the gravel. The boys looked up and bowed to her with chivalrous grace. Lady Constance cried, "See how I have him in hand, mamma!" But she was too prudent to look off Selim's ears as yet. The Countess smiled to see them go,—a sweet smile and bright. She stood too high for any of them to have seen that its brightness sparkled through tear-drops.

The precise details of Ned's confessional conference that evening with his father have not been handed down. The penance imposed included, apparently, satisfaction to Tommy Wilmot's injured feelings, for he laid out a bright sixpence next day in "candy rock" and toffy, and was in possession of a bag of marbles envied by the whole village school.

CHAPTER II.

BAREEN of its chief blessedness is the boyhood of him that has no mother. But Edward Locksley's boyhood had been blessed with almost a double mother-love. Lady Cransdale had more than half adopted him to son-ship. There was hereditary bond of friendship and esteem between the house of Cranleigh and the Locksleys. The grandfathers of the two boys who played under the cedars had tightened it. They were brother soldiers in one regiment during the American War of Independence. Either had contracted close obligation to the other for life or liberty in the vicissitudes of that adventurous struggle.

“John, Earl of Cransdale, then Viscount Cransmere, left the army before the outbreak of the ensuing great continental wars. His friend, Edward Locksley, followed the profession of arms until the day of Corunna. There he fell, in command of a

regiment of Light Infantry, under the eyes of his noble chief, doomed to death on the self-same day.

His brother soldier did more than a brother's part for his children. Young Robert Locksley, our Edward's father, owed, in great measure, to the Earl the completion of his school career, his entrance at the university, and his early admission to a post of confidence and wealth. He had been now for years under the elder lord, and then under his son, the late Earl Philip, manager of the Cransdale estates, intimate counsellor and friend of all at Cransdale park.

Earl Philip had been a statesman, and had filled important offices abroad.

"I could hardly have gone upon that Indian governorship," he used to say, "if I had not had Locksley to leave here in my place. But with him here, I believe the county gained by my turning absentee."

Robert Locksley made a wise choice when he chose the old Rector's daughter, Lucy Burkitt, to his wife. "Meek-hearted Lucy" was her distinctive title in her own family. She was pretty; she was gentle; she was tender; a true helpmeet for him every way. Knowing, for instance, better than he could, all the folk on the estates, among whom she was born and bred. Gently born and gently bred, moreover; for she was county-family,

too, and the dames of the loftiest county magnates need not disown her.

"What a comfort," said Lady Hebblethwaite, at the manor-house, Sir Henry's wife, to Mrs Mapes, of Maperley, "to have the old Archdeacon's granddaughter at the Lodge, at Cransdale. The Locksleys, too, were always gentle folk, and the late Colonel a distinguished soldier. But I had my fears lest Robert, in his peculiar position, might look us out some vulgar rich woman."

"In his position, dear. How so? The Cransdale agency must be an excellent thing, I fancy."

"Excellent, indeed; but still precarious. Any day a quarrel with the Earl, you know, or with the guardians, should a life drop and a minority ensue, eh?"

"Well to be sure, I never thought of that. And, as you say, a quarrel or a change of dynasty: but Lucy Burkitt is Lucy Locksley now. A dear good little girl she always was, and I had a vast respect for her grandfather, the late Archdeacon; and I shall drive over to the Lodge and call on Thursday."

And Mrs. Mapes, of Maperley, did call. So did Sir Henry and Lady Hebblethwaite. So did the very Rev. the Dean of St. Ivo and his wife. So did some greater and some lesser personages than

these, until the social position of the Locksleys was indisputably and most honourably defined.

Their Edward was born in the same week as Lord Cransdale's heir, and both babies were christened on the same day. The Earl, who stood godfather to little Ned, would say, laughingly, that he and Phil were twins, and often brought one on each arm to be nursed as such by his Countess. Lady Constance, in the full dignity of some two years' seniority, called them both "ickle baby brothers." She herself had first seen the light in the Government House of an Indian presidency, whence a change of Cabinet at home recalled her parents some months before the birth of Philip. Edward Locksley proved to be an only child, so the Earl insisted upon his being playmate with his own children. One governess taught the three at first; later, there was one tutor for the two boys.

"Kate," said the Earl, some time before his death, "Kate, let the boys grow up together. Philip will want a brother. Locksley will make a man of his boy if any father can. And if they grow up as brothers, he will be a kind of father, of course, to poor Phil. You are a woman of women, Katty dear; but a boy wants a man's hold over him."

Her dying husband's wish became to her sacred

law. The Lodge, as the Locksley's dwelling-place was called, stood not far from the great House, and within the precincts of its park. The boys had rooms in either, where all things were ordered for them as for brothers of one blood. Their little beds, their bookshelves, their desks, all in duplicate, save in so far as individual character will stamp differences even on the very features of very twins.

But the time was come when both boys must leave home. From father to son, for many generations, all Cranleighs had been Etonians. Catherine, Countess of Cransdale, spite of the desperate hug in which her widowed heart held her boy, was not the woman to let her weakness falter from the manly educational traditions of his race. Philip must go to Eton, and Edward must go with him, of course. The boys were eager to confront the adventures of that new world. Had not each himself, and each the other, to rely upon?

But that eagerness was hard for two mothers' hearts to note. It is not only when prodigals insist on leaving home that parent hearts are wrung; dutiful and loving children wring them sometimes by their cheerful parting smiles. Poor Lady Cransdale! She wished in her secret soul she could detect, in Philip's laughing eyes, a passing trace of that feeling which it was costing herself such heroic

effort to conceal. Lucy felt a touch of the same anguish, but between her noble friend and her there was a world of difference. Lady Cransdale had been a happy wife ; Lucy was one. Neither, however, would betray to her son the keenness of her inward pang. It was left to Lady Constance to do this. She was indignant at what she thought their heartlessness, and did her best to punish them both for it. She went pricking about with sharp words to find a soft spot of cowardice or of tenderness in either, but with little enough success at first. She racked her brains to think of all the cruelties she had heard or read that big bullies inflicted upon luckless youngsters. But this bugbear startled them not. They were country-bred lads, bold, active, and hardy. Moreover, they declared it would take a strapping big fellow to lick them both together, and they would fight for one another to the death. Lady Constance thought that was likely enough, to be sure.

She tried an appeal to Phil's possible fastidiousness.

" You know you're nice enough about things at home, Philip. How shall you like to boil your big boy's eggs, and bake his toast, and fry his sausages, and, may be, black his boots."

" Prime !" he retorted, " especially the cooking.

You've a taste that way yourself, Con, or had, at least. Don't you remember the row you got into with Mademoiselle, for warming veal 'croquettes' on the school-room shovel once!"

"Years ago, when I was a little girl," she said, firing up with the conscious dignity of a lady in her teens. "No Lady-bird nor Light-foot, nor Selim for you, Phil; not one gallop the whole dreary half! Oh dear!"

This was an artful and unexpected stroke. It told upon his Lordship evidently, whose face lengthened, till Ned came to the rescue with a suggestion of "capital fun in boats."

"Boats, indeed! As if either of you could row a bit. Nice blisters you'll have on both your hands!"

This was a relapse into the Cassandra vein, and was accordingly derided.

"Oh, ah! blisters. Much we should mind them, I suppose. Maybe we didn't blister our hands with pickaxes when we dug out the badger in Cransmere wood.

"Selfish creatures boys are, to be sure!", she said again, after a pause. "Neither of you seems to care a bit for leaving me here all alone. No one to ride with but old James, pounding behind! No one to go fishing with up on the moor. No one to walk

with as far as the 'Long Beeches' or over to Cransmere wood, where your badger was."

"Why, Con, you know we shall be very sorry to leave you, and all that, you know: but fellows must go to school. There's Hebblethwaite minor, in the 'lower fourth' at Eton, and even young Mapes, from Rugby, conceited monkeys, that try to lord it over us whenever we come across them."

"It's not so strange of Ned, perhaps, not to care for leaving me," she continued, with a slight flush, perhaps indicative of Junonian resentment after all; "but for you, Phil, my own, own, only brother," and here her voice began to tremble, and Philip to feel queer again.

"How can you talk of being left alone, Con? Won't there be Mrs. Locksley left and Mammy too, whom you pretend sometimes to love much more than I do. As if a fellow could help go-go-going to schoo-oo-ool;" he answered, with an approach to a downright whimper.

"No, indeed," exclaimed her Ladyship, brightening up in view of the adversary's faltering, "but you needn't talk so much about its being 'precious jolly' to go."

"When did you ever hear me call it precious jolly?" demanded luckless Philip, with some asperity.

"After tea, on Monday, before the lights were brought into the library," she replied at once, with that fatal female accuracy in the record of minor events. The reminiscence was too precise to be gainsaid.

"Mrs. Locksley heard it, and felt it too, I could see by her face." Here Ned's valiance began oozing out, and he quietly left the room.

"Yes," she continued, "and so did poor mammy too. I saw her face, by the fire-light, looking so pale and sad. You might have some feeling, Phil, for her at least."

"Oh Con, how dare you say that I don't feel for her, my own poor darling mammy!"

As he spoke he heard his mother's footfall close behind him, and turning, the boy's bravery gave way at sight of her. He ran and threw his arms around her with a sob.

Ned, meanwhile, went home, whistling, to the lodge. But Lady Constance's word had pricked his heart also. His father and mother were out and would be back late to tea, the servant said.

"Good thing, too," muttered he, striding up stairs to his own room; "time for a think, and I want one." Ned's ways were quaint occasionally. He bolted the door, shut the shutters, and lit a pair of candles. Then he took down a slate, and tilting it

up upon a Latin dictionary, proceeded to write, as if taking down the data of a problem in arithmetic, "If Philip goes to Eton ; but my mother don't like me to go so far from home, why need I ?"

Plunging both hands into his curly brown hair, and propping both elbows on the table, he glared at the slate, and thought.

When the tea-bell rang, he washed his hands and face with scrupulous nicety, brushed and combed his tumbled locks, returned the dictionary to its shelf, the slate to its peg, extinguished the candles carefully, and went very deliberately down stairs.

"I say, pappy dear," he began, soon after tea was done, "I've a favour to beg ; important too."

"Well, Ned, what is it ?"

"I want to go to school at St. Ivo."

"To school at St. Ivo, Ned !" cried his father in amazement, and his mother dropped her knitting to stare at him.

"There's a first-rate master," he said, "at the cathedral school."

"Pray, Ned, who told you that ?"

"Oh, I heard the Dean say, one day, at the Park, that the new man there, Mr. Ryder, had put a new life into the whole concern."

"Well, I believe he's done wonders, but not made an Eton of St. Ivo—eh, Ned ?"

"Hardly; but it's a deal cheaper, you know," insinuated artful Edward.

"That's more my look-out than yours, my boy. I wonder what's put this freak in your head?"

Lucy was not so strong of heart, perhaps, as Lady Cransdale; at least, she had not known the cruel need to brace it, which the Countess knew so well. The boy's freak flashed a gleam of hope upon her. St. Ivo was not 'ten miles off: Eton close on two hundred. At St. Ivo she might have weekly, daily sight of Ned, if she were minded. No need for mother lips to thirst so many weary months for kisses. It was a sore temptation.

With an effort to conceal her eagerness, she asked:

"Should you, then, really like St. Ivo better Ned!"

He looked her full in the face, and the boy, too, was tempted by the craving tenderness which gleamed in her soft eyes. But his father's look was on him also, full of manful help.

"I didn't quite say that, dear mammy."

"What did you say, then?"

"Only that I wanted, if pappy would allow, to go to the cathedral school."

"You are not afraid of facing so many strangers as at Eton, surely," said his father.

"The more the merrier," he bounced out inadvertently; "I like a jolly lot of fellows!"

He caught the fall upon his mother's countenance, and was acute enough to see that he had betrayed once more to her the feeling which Lady Constance said had hurt her.

Lucy seemed to lose again the clue she thought to hold. The fledgling's wing was not so weak as she had almost hoped. It was ready for a long flight from the nest. She plied her knitting again, part sorrowful, part proud, to note the spirit of her boy. Presently she put the knitting by for good and all. Her head ached a little and she was going early to bed. Ned ran after her for another parting kiss before she reached her room. It sent her to sleep happy.

"What put this notion of St. Ivo in your head?" asked Mr. Locksley once more when the boy returned.

"If you don't mind, I'd rather say no more about it," answered Ned, discomfited.

"But if I do?"

"Of course, then, I shall out with it."

"Out with it, then, my boy," said Mr. Locksley.

So he told his father how Lady Constance "went on" at him and Philip about their obdurate cheerfulness in face of approaching departure; and how

her ladyship had given them to understand, among other things, that their respective mothers were pining at the prospect.

"Then, to put the question as your mother did herself just now, you wouldn't like St. Ivo better?"

"Oh, my! Better! What? St. Ivo, with thirty fellows in the poky little close, better than Eton with hundreds, and the playing-fields, and the river, and 'Pop,' and Montem, and all that! I should think not, just about."

"But if your mother should wish to keep you nearer home, you're ready to give it up?"

He nodded assent.

"You'll have to give up Phil, too, remember. He won't go to St. Ivo."

Ned gave a sigh; but said resolutely, "She's more to me than Phil, or half-a-dozen. I'll do what she likes, please."

"Well, sleep on it to-night, Ned; we'll talk it over again to-morrow."

Lady Constance, proud of having crushed her brother into contrition, looked anxiously the next day for signs of relenting in Master Ned. Perhaps she wished, perhaps she feared, to know whether, amongst other things, the boy would care a little for leaving her. Some say, to use a dyer's simile, that jealousy must be the mordant to fix any tint

of true love, even be it only sisterly. I fancy that with women it is almost always so—much more invariably than with our less sensitive brotherhood. But Ned gave no sign. His countenance was imperturbable when, in the afternoon, as the ponies came round, his father told him that he must walk home with him, instead of riding with the others. There was a whole catechism of questionings in Lady Constance's eyes as she rode off with Philip; but Ned went, whistling and incurious, with his father.

"Don't, Ned. It worries me," said Mr. Locksley.
"I want to have a reasonable talk with you."

"All right, then," and he ceased his whistling.

"One good turn deserves another, doesn't it, my boy?"

"To be sure, and more."

"Why more?"

"Because the first's the first, and done out of mere good will."

"Right, Ned. Saint John has said it: 'Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us.' Love's nobler than gratitude. The second turn wants multiplying to come up to the first."

"Ah! just about," said Ned, relapsing into a whistle to ease the overcharge of seriousness.

"Don't, boy; but listen."

Trust begets trust, which little else has power to beget. Locksley knew this much of the secret to win a son's heart well. He therefore told his boy far more explicitly than ever yet what were his obligations to the Cransdale family. How he had found a father in the old Earl when the Frenchman's bullet had made him fatherless; how his relations with the late Lord had but increased the debt. "I say nothing, Ned, of what his widow has ever been to you yourself."

"No need, pappy. No fear I shall forget it."

"Well, now, supposing you had set your heart on staying here at home—"

"Which I haven't, mind," interpolated Ned.

"But if you had, and we into the bargain, but Lady Cransdale wanted a friend for her boy Phil at school?"

"Why, what a father owes a son owes; I should have to go."

It was a singular saying for a boy. Locksley turned it over in his mind aloud.

"What a father owes a son owes,' eh? That's not a thought with which my own life ever set me face to face. But you're right about it, Ned, quite right."

Then, after a bit, "You needn't speak again about St. Ivo to your mother."

"Wasn't going to," quoth Edward.

"For better or for worse you go with Phil to Eton."

"For worse, indeed! You silly pappy! Floreat Etona!" And up went Ned's hat, with a whoop, into the air.

CHAPTER III.

"We shall have a 'tuft' in the class-list, for a wonder, this term," said a student of Christ-church to another undergraduate of that stately house of learning.

"High up?"

"A safe 'second.' "

"What, Royston a safe second?"

"First, perhaps."

"Oh, nonsense about that."

"Will you give me two to one in half-crowns against him?"

"Willingly."

"Done with you, then."

"Done. But, I say, what makes you risk your small cash that way? Royston's too dressy to be cut out for 'a first.'"

"Well, Grymer, who 'coaches' me too, says he's

lots of logic in him for a lord. And he was a bit of a ‘sap’ at Eton all along, they say.”

This logical lord, Baron Royston, of Rookenhamb, was a distant kinsman of the Cransdale family, and their near neighbour in the county. He was like Philip, his own son, as they say; but had lost both parents in early life. He was undoubtedly of a studious and thoughtful turn of mind, and had made the best of Eton and of Oxford. A parliamentary career was his ambition. The dressiness wherewith his depreciatory fellow-student had reproached him was but an indication of a certain real indifference to his personal appearance, combined with a great horror of slovenliness in any matter. He happened to employ the best tailor in town and to have a judicious valet. Their judgment and his own methodical tidiness bestowed on him his unexceptionably fine clothing.

But the student’s confidence in Grymer’s “coaching” acumen was not misplaced. He pocketed his unbelieving friend’s half-crowns, for when the class-list was out, there stood in the distinguished forefront, among the few names in ‘the first,’ “Royston, Dominus de, Ex Aede Christi.”

Among all the congratulations which reached him, none were more grateful than those which came from his kinswoman, Lady Cransdale. As

a small indication of his gratitude, he ran down to Eton, took Phil out for the afternoon, and "tipped" him.

"A regular brick is Royston," cried that young nobleman to Ned, whom he met later, coming up from 'out of bounds.' "Here's something like a tidy tip, look," and he unfolded crisp and crackling, a new bank-note. "He's been and got a first at Oxford, Royston has. I know they'll be no end of glad at home."

But Ned did not seem sympathetic.

"We'll have such a sock," ran on Philip. "I'll ask all the fellows in the ten-oar, and all of our cricketing eleven at my dame's. Come on, Ned. We'll have sausage-rolls, and raspberry-puffs, and champagne! Hooray!"

Still Ned was apathetic, and excused himself. He'd a copy of verses to show up, and must go and grind at them.

"Verses be blowed! I'll tell you what, Ned, you're always rusty about Royston now-a-days. I can't conceive what ails you. It wasn't always so. I think he's an out-and-outer, and so they do at home, I know."

Ned knew it also. Perhaps "at home" the expression might have been other. Countesses and their lady-daughters don't scatter slang with the

graceless ease of their noble relatives at Eton. But the sentiment was the same; and the sweet breath of their praise of him was just, perhaps, what turned to rust upon the true steel of Edward's feeling. The boys were doing well upon the whole at Eton. They took their removes in due season regularly, and were "sent up for good" a satisfactory number of times. Ned was the steadier reader of the two; but Philip was very quick-witted, and held his own. They were never many places apart in school. They were firm friends still; indeed, almost as brotherly as ever. But in the little world of a public school, it was impossible for the old identity of taste and pursuits to live on unimpaired. Ned cricketed, Phil boated; thus one was thrown among the wet "bobs," one among the "dry." Ned was a careless dresser, Phil followed at humble distance the sartorial splendours of Lord Royston. Phil's chums were chosen from the rattlepates, Ned's from the more earnest sort in mischief or in better things. Phil's mind was set on a commission in the Guards, Ned —those were not Crimean days, good reader—would hazard a sneer at Windsor campaigners now and then.

Casual circumstances, too, began to hint at the divergence inevitable even between brothers' paths

as boyhood closes. Three vacations had been spent asunder. Twice the Cransdales had been on distant visits; once the Locksleys had spent summer holidays from home. That was a memorable period in Edward's history, for it was then that he first made acquaintance with his first-cousin by the mother's side, Keane Burkitt; then also that he first fell in with Colonel Blunt.

Lucy Locksley's eldest brother, James Burkitt, had been some years dead. In his lifetime he had been a solicitor in the flourishing seaport of Freshet. He had been a successful man of business, and had known successes in other ways. For instance, he had won, to his surprise, and some said to her own, the hand of Isabella Keane, the reigning beauty of that watering-place. There was a glitter in that showy young lady's eyes, which might have portended greed and hardness, and a restless temper. She made him, on the whole, however, a better wife than many had expected; but did little towards counteracting by her influence such faults of the same character as existed naturally in her husband, and were fostered by the peculiar temptations of his calling. When he died he left his widow a reasonable provision, partly realized and partly charged upon the profits of the firm. For, of course, as I may almost say, James Burkitt, Esq.,

Solicitor, was in partnership. Burkitt and Goring was the firm. A very confidential firm indeed; in whose tin boxes, and more ponderous iron safes, the title-deeds, and wills, and acts of settlement of half the families in Freshet were in safe keeping, to say nothing of documents and debentures affecting the interests of its commercial class.

It was stipulated and secured that in due course of time, his son, Keane Burkitt, should, if so inclined, claim a desk in the firm's office, and ultimately assume in its inner sanctum his father's former place of pre-eminence.

Keane Burkitt was not sent to a public school. His widowed mother had not Lady Cransdale's self-sustaining firmness, nor the help from without which Lucy's momentary weakness found. She sent her son as day-boarder to the so-called Academy-House, at Freshet. There he had few of the advantages of a public school education, none of those which strictly domestic training may afford. He had the manifest disadvantage of becoming presently head boy, without the ordeal of a sufficiently powerful antagonism to have made the upward struggle to the post heroical in mind or body. Nevertheless, he had more than average abilities, and in mere intellectual acquirement,

suffered no great loss by the classical and mathematical curriculum of Academy-House.

When two self-wills, a male and female, are pitted against each other, it is the latter most times which is driven to compass its ends by artifice, and to rule by feigned submission. But in the earlier years of conflict between Keane's temper and his mother's, the rod of power being necessarily in her hand, her son perforce served an apprenticeship to feminine subterfuge and craft. Mother's love, however, will often wax, as son's love wanes. The growing lad grew in his widowed mother's fondness as time went on, and in the natural weakening of her direct authority her fond weakness gathered growth also. Little by little Keane began to feel his way from servitude to tyranny. Yet the outward deference in which he had been schooled sat on his manner still—velvet still gloved the iron grip. A stranger might have thought him a dutiful son, nor would a careless observer, upon longer acquaintance, have thought otherwise. He was now about twenty years of age, senior by a couple of years only to his cousin Edward. His mother's more judicious advisers spoke of the University, but she could not face the sacrifice of parting with him. He neither could nor would stay on at school, and manifested no kind of

readiness to put on business-harness under Mr. Goring. His mother's persuasions failed to move the dead weight of his inert opposition; an attempt at imperative remonstrance had not only failed, but after such fashion as to make her feel that she had born and bred a despot over her. So Mrs. Burkitt taxed her brain to find some other influence which might be brought to bear upon him. Her kinswoman's husband, Robert Locksley, was a notable man of business. To judge by his success in training his own son and Lord Cransdale, he must have some power for governing or guiding boys. Besides which, Mrs. Burkitt had never been forgetful of the fact that Mr. and Mrs. Locksley were people in a position to make some intimacy between them socially desirable. Occasional letters to Lucy, occasional hampers of fish from Freshet, occasional meetings felicitously contrived, had kept the sense of kinsmanship from dying out. One morning, therefore, shortly before the summer vacation at Eton, Lucy found a letter from her sister-in-law in the Cransdale post-bag.

Mrs. Burkitt deplored the circumstance that their two sons should be growing up apart, and utter strangers to each other. Her Keane had left school for good and all, yet was too young to be expected at once to enter upon the drudgery of office work.

He had earned a holiday. The Reverend Principal of Academy-House reported favourably of his attainments. Pupils of that establishment could hardly vie with classical Etonians, yet she should be curious to know how far behind his cousin Edward her Keane had come from his books at last. He had purchased himself a half-decked boat, a miracle of sailing, the pride of Freshet Bay. He was wild to show his cousin such kind of boating as the Thames at Windsor, could not boast. She herself knew well that a fond mother grudged to lose one week of an only son's holiday. So she wished dear Lucy to come with her boy and visit them. She was well aware of the numerous and important claims upon Mr. Locksley's time; but if at any period of the season he, too, could join them, he would confer upon her a greater favour than even the mere honour and pleasure of his presence. He would, perhaps, understand better than her happy sister-in-law on how many points the mother of a fatherless boy, just touching manhood, might require the guidance and advice of such a person as himself.

"I shall write and refuse, of course," said Lucy to Robert, handing him the letter across the breakfast-table.

"Why refuse, dear?"

"Because I can't bear going away from you, you know."

"Well, but you've been out of sorts of late, and still look rather pale. Freshet is famous for its bracing air. You'd better go."

"Ned won't like spending the holidays from home, perhaps."

"Won't he? That sailing-boat, and the fishing in the bay, are likely to prove attractions, I should think."

"Ah, but we shan't have you; Robert, I am afraid. Ned won't like that any more than I shall, I know."

"But I don't know that you won't, Lucy. We're in want of timber for the new farms out by Cransmere, and there are always Norway ships at Freshet. I might combine a stroke of business with a pleasure-trip. Then there's something in what she says about her boy, poor woman. I think I'll take you down there, and come again, perhaps, to bring you back."

CHAPTER IV.

THE sailing-boat was, indeed, a triumph of build and rig. A trimmer and tauter never swam the still waters of Freshet harbour—never skimmed the surf outside in Freshet bay. Ned was charmed with her. Yet when he read, in dainty golden letters on the stern, the name of “Lady Constance,” he frowned—a slight frown only—sharp eyes were wanted to catch its momentary contraction on his forehead. But cousin Keane’s eyes were sharp, and caught it. They saw the lips just tighten, as the brow relaxed, to keep in a question which they would not ask.

“She had none till we knew that you were coming. Then my mother said your mother would like this one; and you, too, perhaps.”

Keane peered into his cousin’s countenance, which at this warning was on its guard and imper-

turbable. So they stepped on board the "Lady Constance," whose owner slipped the moorings.

"Can you steer, Ned?"

The Etonian fixed the tiller, smiling.

"All right, then; I'll mind the sheets."

She was covered with white canvas in no time. There was a light breeze and a sunny ripple on the wave; the boys were soon standing out across the bay.

Mr. and Mrs. Locksley, as befitted seniors, paced solemnly the Esplanade, with Mrs. Burkitt. She judiciously dispensed familiar nods or statelier courtesies to numerous acquaintances and friends whom the breeze that cooled the summer evening brought out to enjoy its freshness upon the favourite public walk. By-and-by they met a tall, thin gentleman, upright of carriage, firm of tread. He wore a single-breasted blue coat, buttoned to the throat, which was encased in a black silk stock. The quick, sharp click of his boot-heels as he brought his feet together, and the regulated precision of his bow could scarcely be mistaken.

"Colonel Blunt," said the widow; "Mr. and Mrs. Robert Locksley."

He gave another precise bow to Lucy; and, looking hard into her husband's face, he said—

"Locksley! Why, bless me, Locksley! A thou-

sand pardons, sir! But your features along with that name seem to come back to me so forcibly. Have I the honour of speaking to a brother officer?"

"No, not exactly," said Robert, good humouredly; "unless you count for such an ex-lieutenant of the Cransdale Yeomanry."

"Well, excuse me, sir. I thought you hadn't quite the cut of our cloth. But—Locksley—let me see—Locksley? Had you an elder brother or relation in the service, sir, may I make bold to ask?"

"Neither, Colonel. But my poor father fell at Corunna. He commanded the Welsh Rangers, in the Light Division, all through Sir John Moore's campaign."

"Good heavens, Mr. Locksley! That explains it all; and accounts for the extraordinary impression made at once upon me by your name and face. I carried the colours of the Rangers at sixteen, sir. I stood not twenty paces from your father when he fell. A gallant soldier, sir!"

He held out his hand, which Locksley took with genuine emotion.

"How very delightful! and how very strange!" said Mrs. Burkitt. "I had no notion, Colonel, that you had served under Mr. Locksley's father. You must follow up this chance introduction, gentlemen.

We dine at seven, Colonel, and shall hope to see you at dinner to-morrow at that hour."

"With greatest pleasure, madam."

He shook Locksley once more cordially by the hand, bowed to the ladies, and passed on. His tramp on the kerbstone was firm and measured as of a sentry in the Guards. He had served in other than "light divisions" since the day when, at Moore's word, the Rangers turned to bay on Soult.

With military punctuality, his peal on Mrs. Burkitt's door-bell overtook the second stroke of seven on her hall-clock.

The Colonel belonged to the old school of soldierly modesty, and was chary of emblazoning achievements on the left breast-flap of his evening coat. But this evening, in honour of his old chief's memory, and in compliment to the presence of his son and grandson, his many-clasped Peninsular medal hung there beside his Companion's badge of the Bath. Colonel Blunt was too courteous a gentleman to pour forth upon the ladies a flood of campaigning stories. He had too much manly reserve to have opened upon his male auditors, unprovoked, the sluices of his recollections. But no sooner had Mrs. Burkitt and Lucy gone up to the drawing-room, and the fresh bottle of claret been uncorked, than

Locksley's desire to hear of his father and Ned's more exacting eagerness applied winches and levers to the hatches which penned his memories back. Then came, indeed, a rush and swirl of narrative and anecdote. Good listeners make good talkers; and upon such the veteran had chanced. "We," and "us," and "ours," studded the sentences. Who that has heard such glorious talk would wish it otherwise? If there be a grain of egotism in that soldierly pride of brotherhood in arms, who will be forward to censure it? The brotherliness is such pure gold that it suffers not by the imperceptible alloy. Nay, the amalgam gains its own special qualities—takes sharper character in the die—gives clearer ring upon the counter of conversation. Robert Locksley was profoundly touched by the respectful admiration which breathed so life-like, after so many years, in the Colonel's reminiscences of his father. It was as if he saw with his own eyes a new growth of laurel spring up over the far-off soldier-grave in Spain. War and weather had so marked and grizzled the man, the civilian scarcely remembered that, after all, the soldier was not by many years his senior. Whereas, the soldier, as he talked, was suddenly grown young again—gone back in fancy to his beardless boyhood—to the day when he carried the colours of the famous Rangers

under a Locksley, less his comrade than his chief.

"Ned," he would say; "Ned Locksley!" looking wistfully from the Etonian's face to his father's; "the name seems more at home in my ear, boy, than in my mouth. The men who called your grandfather 'Ned Locksley' were even then 'mine ancients,' as Jack Falstaff hath it. They fell at Talavera, Salamanca, Vittoria, Quatre-Bras and Waterloo—generals, some of them, poor fellows! when their names figured in their last 'Gazette.' Some few are going still whom I know better now, such as hook-nosed Napier."

The Colonel's talk kindled in Ned's eye a strange light, which the old campaigner noticed though his father did not. As for Cousin Keane, he relished the stories, too; but not quite so much apparently, as he did the first ripe summer fruit of the dessert.

"Ha, youngster! a sweet tooth for early plums, I see. Puts me in mind of Corporal Chunk of 'ours.'"

"Corporal Chunk! well, that's a queer name, Colonel, let's hear about him, pray."

"'Twas in the south of France. Know the country at all, Mr. Locksley? Ah! Well, there are some sandy roads there, and, what's more, choking

hot dusty marches along them, as in all southern countries."

The old campaigner mopped his temples, worn bare by the shako, as if the southern sun were actually glaring on them still.

"One sultry evening I had an advanced picket, and, just after sun-down, halted and turned the men into a fruit-orchard on a grassy sward. That was something like refreshment after a long day's march along a French 'chaussée.' Mr. Locksley, the wine's with you. Corporal Chunk, youngsters, was "Zummerzetsheere." What brought him among Welsh Rangers I never could make out. He'd no Celtic liveliness about him, for certain. A steady soldier, but stupid. Arms were piled—knapsacks off. Some men lay down, wallowing in the soft green grass; some went swarming up into the trees. I took a couple of knapsacks for a pillow, and, stretched on my back, lighted the remnant of a part-smoked cigar. Those were not wasteful times youngsters; we were saving of our minor luxuries. I think I said it was after dusk. Well, the season was too early for any ripe fruit; but the hard stomachs of our 'light bobs' took kindly to the stony green plums. As the men rifled the boughs it was pleasant to hear the rustle of the leaves. Presently came the voice of

Corporal Chunk, calling to a comrade in another tree.

“ ‘ I zaay, Bill ! han’t Vrench plooms wings ? ”

“ ‘ Wings, you blockhead ! No ; not no more nor English uns.’ ”

“ ‘ Doan’t ‘ee zaay zo, Bill ; now doan’t ‘ee ! ’ cried the Corporal ; ‘ else I’ve a bin atin’ cockchaafers more nor this ‘aalf hour ! ’ ”

“ After that, youngsters,” quoth the Colonel, “ we had better go up to the ladies, if Mr. Locksley don’t object.” ”

Upstairs, the drawing-room windows were wide open—the night wind could scarcely stir the light muslin curtains. There was a little balcony where Edward carried out a chair and sat down, leaning his arms on the rail, his chin on his arms. A broad path of heaving silver, laced with dark shadow-lines, as wavelets rose and fell, led his sight out, across the bay, to sea. Whither led it his thought and fancy ? The “Lady Constance” lay at her moorings, right across the silvery track. The voices of father and mother both were audible in the room behind. Once he looked back, and thought his own heart rode at moorings, fast by their love. As he looked out again, a long, glassy swell came rolling in from the bay. The fairy craft courtesied with dancing grace as it slipped under her. What

a shame to tie that life-like thing to moorings ! Soft as the breeze was, her exquisite canvas would catch every breath, if hoisted. What dreamy delight to sail, and sail away, and yet away, beyond the sight-line, all along that heaving silver !

“ Looking for the Skerry, Ned, or sentimentalizing ?” broke in, unpleasantly, the voice of Keane.

“ The moonlight lies just about in line for it ; but it’s so far off one can’t always make it out. We must sail over there and have a day’s rifle-practice at the gulls.”

It was not exactly to the Skerry to shoot gulls that Ned’s fancy had been travelling along the shining seaward path; nevertheless he jumped at the notion—literally, off his chair, no less than figuratively. The old Colonel’s ear had also caught the well-known word.

“ What’s that about rifles, youngster; can you handle one, pray ?”

“ Oh, Colonel,” cried both the boys, “ come with us ; that would be prime. We’re going to the Skerry to shoot gulls.”

“ What ? in that gim-crack boat of Burkitt’s. The next major on the purchase-list would chuckle to see me get on board.”

“ Indeed,” exclaimed her indignant owner, “ you’ve no notion what a sea-boat she is. Stands

as stiff as the lighthouse under half a gale of wind. You needn't be afraid, Colonel. Ask any boatman in the bay."

"Impudent imp! So I needn't be afraid of going to sea in a washing-tub with two monkeys for ship's company. Thank you kindly. But as there's arms on board I think I will go, just to give you two a chance for your lives."

"Hurrah, Colonel!" cried the monkeys, tolerant of insult at the prospect of his joining them.

When he did step on board with them he was concerned to find how little stowage-room there was for his long legs.

"They've worried me many ways, these long legs of mine, and got me taken prisoner once."

"Prisoner! Colonel. One would have thought that long legs, if ever of use, would have been useful to keep one out of that scrape."

"Well, I don't know. Little, stumpy legs beat long shanks at running most times. But I didn't get a chance to run."

"Go about, Ned!" cried his cousin. "It's your head you must mind this time, Colonel, or the boom will take you overboard."

The tack successfully made, the boys begged for the story.

"'Twas on the retreat from Madrid, in 1812.

We had the rearguard, and were all higgledy-piggledy with the French van. Into villages and out of them, like ‘puss in the corner.’ One night a party of ours came on an old fonda. Grand old places some of those, with great vaulted ceilings to the stables and granaries overhead. The owners were gone, and all their goods with them. We ransacked cupboard and corner with no result but fleas, dust, and dead crickets. They had made clean sweep of all but the dirt.”

“Luff, Ned, luff a bit,” said Keane. “Go on, Colonel.”

“In despair I went out to rummage the stables. I had known a muleteer in a hurry leave a crust and a garlicky sausage-end in the hay. And even a handful of horsebeans don’t come amiss in starvation soup, youngsters. It was a great big stable —fifty mules might have stood at bait in it; but rack and manger were as bare as cupboard and shelf. I had a bit of lighted candle and went searching along. At the furthestmost upper end of the last trough I came upon a little pile of lentils. It looked so neat and undisturbed that I thought it must have been formed after the general clearance. I looked up and saw a grain or two on the rack-beam. Looked right up to the ceiling and perceived a crack. A lentil dropped. There was, then,

a store-room over-head. I climbed up on the rack-beam and went along till I saw a trap-door in the ceiling. ‘I’m in luck for once,’ thought I. I could reach the trap with my sword-point; so I gave a shove. Open it went and fell back, inside, with a bang. To spring up and into the gaping hole with the candle-end in my teeth was soon done; but as I was in the candle-end was out. I groped onwards in the dark. I could hear the rats squeak and scamper in amaze; but they were not as amazed as I was at hearing—there was no mistaking it—a French cavalry bugle in the courtyard. To make things worse I felt something give under my left foot. Sure enough; crack went treacherous lath and plaster. I made a blundering attempt to right myself: crack and crash, both heels went through! I was astride upon a cross-beam and both legs dangling down. Vain was the struggle to loose one lanky limb and then the other. There was a fix! Then hoofs clattered, scabbards clanked, spurs jingled underneath. The French Chasseurs were in the stables.”

“Beg pardon, Colonel, but we must go about again.”

Having bobbed under the boom again, and seated himself to windward, he went on.

“There were only some ten or twelve of them,

and the stable was very long. My best hope was they might keep down to the stalls by the door.

"‘Mon sergent,’ quoth a trooper, did we catch any of ‘em?’

"‘Catch, indeed! We couldn’t boil up a trot between us. Poor Cocotte here has had three handfuls of chopped straw in her stomach since yesterday, and a stone under her shoe since this morning on the Sierra. That’s not the way to catch English ‘Voltigeurs,’ eh?’

"‘Geux de pays va. They talk of chateaux in Spain: when I’m Maréchal Duc de N’importe quoi, I’ll take care to build mine out of it.’

"‘En attendant, François, as thou art only Maréchal-des-Logis, let’s look out for the hay-loft.’

"To my discomfiture they lit a lantern and came upwards.

"‘Mille Tonnerres, mon sergent!’ cried François, gaping at the ceiling. ‘Here’s something now, for example! Here’s a pair of legs dangling down like cobwebs.’

"‘Ah, bah! thou art pleasanting.’

"‘Pleasanting! To the contrary. Look at the boots and trowsers!’

"‘Drolls of legs!’ cried the serjeant, holding

up the light. ‘Farcers of legs! Are they live, François?’

“I heard the hilt clang preparatory to ‘draw swords’—I wanted neither prick nor scratch—and fell to kicking vigorously.

“‘Tiens mon vieux!’ said François. ‘They’re not only live but lively.’

“‘Ah ça!’ shouted the serjeant, apostrophizing my nether limbs. ‘To whom are you? and what make you there? Allons donc répondez de suite.’

“There was nothing for it but to confess in such French as I might.

“‘Tiens c’est un Anglischemanne!’ they roared with loud laughter, and soon were up in the loft with a lantern.

“‘Pardon, mon officier! C’est la chasse aux oignons qui a fait vot’ petit malheur!’

“Sure enough, there was a noble string of onions swinging, just over the heap of lentils; and a capital stew the Chasseurs made of them that night, I remember.”

When laughter abated, Ned asked:

“Were you prisoner long, Colonel?”

“Oh dear, no. One of our flank companies—I told you we were all higgledy-piggledy—burst in upon the fonda just before daybreak. There was no spare nag for me, and Cocotte couldn’t carry

double; so they left me behind when they scuttled away."

"Keep her a point away from the lighthouse rock, Ned," said Keane, for the Skerry was full in view, looming large.

The sea-mews had a bad time of it. The Colonel, besides his old experience of the rifle, had made fur and feathers fly all round the world, from almost as many species as the cases of the British Museum boast. Ned's accuracy of eye and steadiness of hand had increased since the day when grief came to the dragon of Ming. Keane, like most seaport lads, was a practised enemy of seabirds. Tired of slaughter, and sharp-set for luncheon, they presently moored the "Lady Constance" far out enough to get off at ebb-tide, and hailing a coble sculled by the lighthouse-keeper's boy, got ashore, to the infinite relief of the Colonel's legs. The Skerry was throughout a tilted table of chalk—on top, a slanting down of thymy grass, close-cropped by sheep, whose backs, as they grazed, made steep inclines. Shade was not attainable, but the breeze was fresh, though the sun was bright. It was pleasant enough, when the mid-day meal was done, to lie upon that short crisp turf, and gaze landward. Day-dreams are dreamy enough, I allow. The shapes that haunt them are vague and ill-de-

fined. The very coast-line of the firm land itself seemed to dance and quiver in haze as Edward looked on it. But indistinctness under broad sunbeams, looking landward, is other than vagueness under weird moonbeams, looking seaward. The sense of the indefinite and of the infinite are not one. The trickeries of the former work not the tender passionate longings of the latter. So Ned turned flat on his back, by-and-by, gazing into the unfathomable heaven. But a seabird came, poising herself on broad lithe wing, right over him. Her clanging cry seemed fraught with reproach. Ned fancied he could discern a blood-spot on the snow of her downy breast. Would she arraign him of cruelty for the death of her mates under the cliff? "Pshaw, nonsense." He jumped up; the bird's wings quivered, and she flew screaming out to sea. To and fro, musing, he paced some fifty yards; then forgot what had brought him to his feet, and found himself laughing at remembrance of the Colonel's long-legged misadventure.

"I'll go and get another story out of the old campaigner."

He found him stretched at full length, his face towards the ground, his head propped on both hands, his eyes on a little open book. Ned started, for staining the white margin was a rusty spot

about the size of the blood-spot on the sea-mew's breast.

"Ha, youngster!" said the Colonel, without looking up, "think it odd to find an old soldier poring over a prayer-book, eh?"

"Colonel, what is that stain upon the margin?" was the answer.

"A drop of a brave man's blood, boy," said the Colonel.

He turned round, sat up, and sent a solemn searching look into the lad's countenance. It was also solemn, and he was moved to speak when otherwise he had kept strict silence.

"Sit down, and I'll tell you how I came by it."

Edward sat down.

"It's in Latin, you see," holding the book towards him; "but the name on the fly-leaf"—turning to it—"is in German."

"*Gretli Steiner*" was written there in a thin-pointed female hand; underneath, in strong, awkward, masculine characters, "*Muss oft gelesen seyn*," "Must often be read."

"I was on divisional staff, in 1815, at Quatre-bras and Waterloo. Late on the latter day, when the French game was up, I went galloping with a message to the Prussians in pursuit. None but the chiefs—and they not always—know at the

time the importance of even great victories. Yet, somehow, that evening, as I rode back over the field, thick-strewn with dead and dying, I felt that I had played my part in one of the great events of history. A desire seized on me to carry some memento from that bloody battle-ground. I dismounted, threw the bridle over my arm, and went picking my way through piteous obstacles. I thought, at first, of taking a cross or medal for a keepsake, but could not bring myself to tear from a defenceless breast what its brave owner would have defended at cost of life itself. Presently I came upon a group of men and horses overthrown in confusion ; corpses of them I mean, of course : three slain lancers of the Polish Guard, and, evidently their slayer with them. You remember I said ‘a brave man’s blood?’ ”

He nodded assent.

“ His horse had fallen first : perhaps that alone lost him. He had not been killed outright, for he was sitting propped against the poor brute’s carcase. By the skull and crossbones on its trappings and his uniform, I knew him for a Death’s-head Bruns-wicker. Poor fellow ! he was cold and stiff—his dying grip fast on this little book, open at this page. He had a wound, among others, on his forehead. This drop must have fallen as he bent

over the book. I took it, put it in my sabretasch, mounted, and rode fast away. For days and days I was uneasy, as if I had robbed the dead. I did not once take out or open the little book of prayers. When at last I did, the sentence on the fly-leaf read like 'an absolution and a pious bequest. 'Must oft be read!' Ay, boy, I have read and read, learnt and repeated these old Latin prayers, till I fancy sometimes some of their spirit has passed into mine. At war, in peace, in camp, at home, I have treasured and carried the dead Brunswicker's book. They shall put it in my shroud with me. I wish I could take it bodily with me into 'kingdom come' to return it to the Brunswicker. Pray God I may meet him there, with 'Gretli,' too, to thank them for the loan of it."

Then uprose the Colonel, and whistled "The British Grenadiers." That is not a devotional tune, nor is whistling a good vehicle for church music; nevertheless, Edward Locksley felt as if he listened to a solemn psalm.

"Now, Ned, look alive! Come along, Colonel!" cried Keane, from below. "Time to be going aboard."

They descended to the beach. The boy with the cable was there, and his father, too.

"Neap tides this a'fternoon, gen'lmen," holloaed

the latter, though he stood within a yard of them. He was wont to lose one-half his words, blown down his throat, upon that windy Skerry.

"Boat's aground, seemin'ly: can'tee wait till't turns again?"

"Not if we're to make Freshet before sundown," said the owner.

"What sort of bottom is it?"

"Soft and sandy, master; ye mought pole her out into deep water wi'out harmin' her keel, easily."

"Well, we'll try it, anyhow."

"Send boy back for me, to help shove, if she's very fast, master!"

"Ay, ay," cried Keane, as they put off in the cable.

Fast she was, sure enough. The boy went back, and brought his broad-shouldered sire to assist. Up to the waist in water, he applied the strength of those broad shoulders to the bow. A few strains and a few grunts, walruswise; then she began to slide, ever so little.

"Yeo ho, heave ho!" and off she goes at last.

Keane was in the bows, pole in hand, and one foot on the sprit. A few words passed between him and his helpers, which for the flapping of the sails that the Colonel was hoisting were not heard by Ned. He was at the helm again. They were

soon out of shoal water, and had all on board ship-shape. Ned called out to his cousin—

“Did you ‘tip’ those fellows, Keane?”

“No. Why should I?”

“They took a deal of trouble to get us off.”

“Well, why shouldn’t they?”

“I don’t say they shouldn’t; but we should have ‘tipped’ them.”

“Bother them, they’ll do well enough.”

“That’s more than we’ve done.”

“Don’t seem to see it,” argued Keane. “The shilling’s as well in our pocket as theirs. What’s the use of shillings at the Skerry? The sea-mews don’t keep shops: ha, ha, ha!”

Keane laughed at his own joke, but the laugh grated on his cousin’s ear.

This was but one day of many spent in the Colonel’s company. He took as kindly to the youngsters as they admiringly to him. Keane said he thought him good fun. Ned secretly resented this off-hand expression. He relished the fun to the full as much as his cousin; but owned, in the very fibre of his heart, that some better thing than fun might be gotten out of the old soldier’s company. The Colonel would laugh, himself, at camp jokes and anecdotes till his sides seemed in danger of splitting the close-buttoned military frock. But

under the straining cloth, Ned's eye seemed ever to discern the squared edges of the Brunswicker's prayer-book. "Old Colonel," as the boys might call him, he was hard, and hale, and active yet. His stories came down to the most modern military times. He was home on a year's furlough from India, where his regiment was likely to remain some time. He would often say that he could bear no longer the slip-shod scuffle of promenaders on the Esplanade, that his ear pined for the measured thunder of a regiment's tramp. He declared that the "Gazettes" in the 'Times' put him in terror twice a-week, lest he should read his own name amongst unfortunates "shoved upon the Major-General's shelf!"

"I don't want to lay-by just yet, boys. I've neither chick nor child, and can't feel at home but in camp or barrack-yard."

Ned's great delight was to get him upon Indian ground—the only true field for a soldier's energy, as it then appeared.

"Tell you what, Colonel, if I take a shilling, I shall take it from John Company sooner than from Her gracious Majesty."

The old "Queen's officer"—King's officer that had been so long—would shake his head at this,

and purse up his mouth ; nevertheless, Ned's reasonings were not easily gainsaid.

"Take the Company's shilling!" cried Keane, contemptuously ; "what's the good ? India's used up, nothing but dry sticks come rattling down, now-a-days, for shaking the Pagoda tree. Better stop at home, and feather your nest at Cransdale, Ned, my boy."

"Stop at home I shall," Ned answered, somewhat ruffled ; "but as for feathers, I'd sooner have them on my wings than in my nest."

"Well said, youngster," quoth Colonel Blunt.

The vacation drew to a close. The elder Locksley came down again to Freshet, for no timber ships had been there when he first came with his wife and son. Ned had advised him now that two Norwegians had at last appeared. They were at anchor far from the fashionable promenade, opposite a crazy old pier, whence a flight of steps, slippery with tangle, led down to a strip of beach. The shingle had long since disappeared under layers of broken bottles and fragmentary crockery, lobster claws and oyster shells, battered tea-kettles and sodden cabbage stumps. Not even daily ebb and flow could clear the melancholy "detritus" away. Thither came Robert Locksley, with his son, to hail the nearest Norwegian for a boat. But,

looking downwards, Ned perceived the coble from the Skerry, with her nose on that unsavoury strip of sea-beach, and the boy asleep in her.

“ Holloa, boy, put us aboard the barque there.”

“ Ay, ay, sir,” said the boy, trained by his father, the old coast-guardsman, to obey at once a voice of authority; but there was a sulkiness about his deference, for all his practical obedience.

“ Hold on alongside, we shan’t be long aboard.”

“ Ay, ay, sir,” with a grumble and a scowl.

But the scowl vanished in a pleasurable grin, and the grumble into the cheeriest of “ Thank’ee, sirs,” as the coble touched the slimy steps, and Ned handed over three half-crowns.

“ You must be flush of money, Ned, to pay such wages for such work. Easy earnings, seven-and-sixpence for five hundred yards!” his father said.

“ Do you remember Tommy Wilmot and the bag of marbles, pappy?”

“ Can’t say I do. Did you give him seven-and-sixpence for it?”

“ It was a practical discourse of yours on compensation, pappy dear, that little affair of Tommy’s. But never mind; it’s another man’s secret why the boy there got seven-and-six. Come along.”

Away they went, arm in arm, happy father and

happy son, trusting and trustworthy in a great matter or in a small.

The next day was to be their last at Freshet. Mr. Locksley and the Colonel were both to accompany the ladies in a carriage drive to some ruin on a headland, which Ned had visited, and did not care to see again. He, therefore, and Keane took a farewell cruise. They sailed westward to a rocky islet half way between the mainland and the Skerry. They had both fowling-piece and rifle aboard, though Ned said he would shoot no more at sea-mews. The rock was reached and rounded without adventure. On the return, however, they came across a large, rare, diving-bird. It kept swimming, ducking, disappearing and reappearing right in front of them, in the most persevering and tantalizing manner. Ned's vow was against purposeless murder of sea-mews; but the securing of such a specimen could not fall under its provisions. Forbid it science! to say nothing of sport. Ned was as eager as Keane to get a fair shot at it. Bang! and bang! went both barrels at last. But the saucy diver must have witnessed experiments with Eley's patent cartridges before that afternoon, so accurately did it calculate their utmost range, and keep just out of it.

"It's not a bit of use, Ned," said Keane, "shot won't touch him; you must try the rifle."

He took it in hand, and waited with patient, deliberate aim till the bird rose up once more in the water, flapping his fin-like wings in a sort of mockery. 'Crack!' "No go!" said both boys as, true to his kind, the diver dived.

"You've winged him, though!" cried Keane, breathless with excitement, as the bird, once more on the surface, took to churning the water with piteous flaps.

"Haul a bit on the mainsheet! I'll steer down on him!"

The 'Lady Constance' skimmed the water as if the steersman's eagerness had quickened her very frame. The bird seemed unable to dive again, but swam fast away. Not so fast, however, as the 'Lady Constance,' which was soon up with and almost over it. Keane let the rudder go and made a clutch at the bird as it passed under the stern. The 'Lady Constance' broached and fell away. Keane was overboard, with an agonizing cry for help. Born by the sea-shore, and at home from boyhood on its waves, the lad, like so many of his breeding, could not swim a stroke. The Etonian was more truly amphibious. Coat and shoes were off in

a twinkling, lithe as otter or seal, he was in the water to the rescue.

"All right, old fellow! Here you are! Don't catch at me! don't splash so! tread water gently and I'll keep you afloat."

He had him tight by the collar from behind. So far so good. The mischief was, that the current was not strong enough to keep the 'Lady Constance' from drifting before the wind, though strong enough to make pushing Keane against it no joke. Ned saw the distance increasing with dismay. To save himself were but a sport of swimming; but this widow's only son—to think of losing him! He struck out with steady but desperate force. A great floating rack of seaweed came happily down the current, plump against the broadside of the boat. Ned had presence of mind to note the slackening, and redoubled efforts. Thus both lads' lives were saved. But when they had hoisted themselves by main force over the gunwale on board again, he was exhausted, and for a few minutes lay on his back.

When he got breath again he sat up and took the tiller-bar in hand.

"Mind the sheets, Keane, haul the jib closer home."

He put the boat's head seaward.

"What on earth are you after, Ned? Let's make for the pier-head, quick," said the other dripping lad.

"After the puffin, to be sure," he answered, imperturbably. "A little taunter; that will do."

The bird was once more overtaken, and this time secured in safety. Neither then nor thereafter did one word touching Keane's rescue cross the lips of Ned Locksley, which was characteristic of him. But not one word crossed Keane's lips either, which was also characteristic of him.

CHAPTER V.

It was after Easter the following year. New men were in office. Their first measure of importance had been carried by a narrow majority in the Commons. Upon its reception "in another place" might hang the fate of Government. An animated debate: perhaps a close division, would enliven the decorous monotony of the Upper House. To make matters worse, the noble Earl who led for Ministers was feverish and in bed. Much would depend upon a very young debater, and still younger official, Under-Secretary to the department which the Bill more immediately affected.

"Nervous thing for Royston," said one junior peer to another coming in from the lobby. "Does he funk it much."

"I don't know whether he does; but I should

think Government did." They looked up at the ladies mustering in force already.

"Any thing worth looking at?" asked one hereditary legislator, who wore an eyeglass because he really was near-sighted.

"Nothing particular, except the Cransdale girl," quoth his compeer, superciliously.

"Well, she is particular. And how well her mother wears."

"Ah! to my mind, she beats Lady Constance hollow."

"Hardly that; but she's a grand type certainly. There's Royston up now, isn't he? Hear, hear!"

Lord Royston was up, and, luckily for him, without suspicion that the eyes of Lady Cransdale and her daughter were upon him. His opening sentences were firm and self-possessed. He was well on in his speech when, during an interruption on a point of statistics, he first became aware of it. The discovery during an oratorical period might have thrown him off his balance; but having a blue book in hand, and a string of figures in mouth to confute his noble interrupter, time was given him to recover before launching out again. His argument was precise and clear, and as he came to the wider political and moral aspects of the measure, enthusiasm roused him to eloquence.

Cheers with the chill off, somewhat rare in that senate of patricians, greeted his winding up. When he sat down he had earned a genuine and honourable success. Several distinguished elders came across and shook hands with him. The subsequent debate was lively, but the division favourable. And Lady Constance had been looking on.

Her mother's presence with her was a stronger instance of interest in their young kinsman than even he had dared to reckon upon. Lady Cransdale had not been at a debate since her own dear Philip had spoken on his return from India, those weary widowed years and years ago.

It was happy for such interests of the British Empire as the business of Lord Royston's Under-Secretaryship might affect that nothing complex or important was on hand next morning. Choice between horns of one dilemma at a time is sufficient for the mind of any budding statesman. And the noble Under-Secretary was sorely exercised by the momentous question : "Should he call or not upon the Cransdales to thank them for their presence ?" To do so might savour of vanity ; not to do so, of indifference. It would not do to look ungrateful, nor would it do better to look like fishing for compliments. As he docketed papers and scrawled signatures mechanically, determina-

tion went swinging to-and-fro. The question ended, as many do, by settling itself. Riding up through St. James's after office-hours, he met the Cransdale carriage, and the Countess beckoned to him.

"Well, Royston, I congratulate you. We were in the House last night."

"Almost to my discomfiture."

"Civil! when we took so much interest in your success."

"True, though. Friends make the worst audience."

"Then why do they go to back a man up and cheer him?"

"Oh, party friends, that's quite another thing. Yet they would be nothing but for party enemies."

"Do you really mean," said Lady Constance, "that you would sooner face enemies than friends?"

"Than some friends, certainly," he answered, flushing to his hat brim.

"But last night," said her mother, "the interest must have been too keen to let you care for individual hearers, friend or foe."

"Keen enough, but there are keener."

He was afraid of his own boldness, and did not dare to look up and sun his triumph in Constance's

soft eyes, when her mother assured him that many of the first men in the House had spoken of it in the highest terms.

"Have you heard from Philip?" he asked, to turn off the conversation and escape from its delicious pain.

"Oh, yes! And the boys have whole holiday on Thursday, so I'll have up him and Ned to town. Come and dine with us to meet them."

"Delighted!" said the Under-Secretary, bringing his spurs, in unadvised ecstasy, so near his spirited horse's flanks that he started off and went plunging up Constitution Hill in wildest fashion.

"Royston's been and done it just about, Ned," cried Philip, bouncing into Locksley's room, the *Times* in one hand, and his mother's letter in the other. Unconsciously merciless, he threw down the newspaper and insisted on inflicting Lady Cransdale's account of her visit to the House upon his friend. "I've a scrap of a note from Con, too, and she says it was 'out and out.'"

"I don't believe it," blurted out Ned, beside himself.

"Don't believe what? Not what Con says of Royston's speech? Read it in the *Times*, then, and you'll see 'twas an out and outer."

"Perhaps it was; but she never talks slang,"

said Ned, catching at a means of extricating himself.

"Oh, bother, Ned; we're mighty particular all of a sudden, eh? Anyhow, Constance says she thought it fine and eloquent. And we shall have an opportunity of patting him on the back for it. Mammy says we may go up to town on Thursday."

Closé conflict was in Ned's heart, between delight at the thought of seeing Lady Constance, and pain at seeing Lord Royston in her company. Young "grown men" have an irritating way sometimes of making young "ungrown men" feel their distance from their immediate elders; but Lord Royston had never so dealt by Ned. He liked the lad, and respected him; and, in his own undemonstrative way, had shown him that he did.

Now, ingratitude was Ned's abhorrence, yet there is a gratitude most ungrateful to him that pays it. He owned obligation, but felt its withes cut to the bone the wrist it bound. For, as my readers have seen long since, the poor lad's heart had yielded to the mastery of that passion which makes boys men—and men, boys. He knew not—how should he?—at what precise period Constance had lost her sisterly character, and stood out robed before his eyes in all the royalties of love; but early jealousy of Royston had long since taught him how to the

word "passion" the old Latin meaning clings—how truly it is "a suffering." Yet Lady Constance's manner towards himself was less reserved and more affectionate than towards the other. Ned would exult in this sometimes, and sometimes quail at it. Sometimes his own lifelong intimacy with her would be counted gain, and sometimes loss. They stood upon such different footings that nothing fairly showed her judgment as between them.

"If I, too, were a distant kinsman, or he, too, were the close companion of her childhood, perhaps I might conjecture what she feels concerning us!" As for Lord Royston's feeling concerning her, spite of his equable demeanour, Ned had with unerring instinct conjectured it by countless subtle tokens. He knew that one name lay hidden in his own heart and in her kinsman's, and the knowledge was his daily disquieting.

It never troubled him that Lady Constance was his elder. For, first, the difference was no great one at the most; and, next, man's conscious manliness carries a consciousness of headship with it which takes little account of difference in age. The feeling takes an ugly shape at times. An urchin in the nursery, who cannot reach up to the father's knee, will class himself with him, and say, "We men," in full disdain of mother, nurse, and elder

sisters. Yet purge it of its arrogance, as fire of love can purge it purest, and the feeling is manly and worthy of a man. Younger men are wont to set their heart on older, older men on younger, women than themselves. Experience of life has not yet shown me that the older man's is always, or often, the truest ideal of what is love-worthy in woman. But, in truth, it did trouble Ned right sore that the man whose rivalry he had divined should be his elder. Such a lady's wooers must prove their worth, and Royston was proving his worthily ; that could not be denied. Royston's were a man's efforts and a man's successes ; his own mere schoolboy's struggles, and their need a schoolboy's prize. His thought was ever fretting at the contrast—ever fretting, and ever devising how best to burst upon a sudden the boundary which fences boyhood off from man's estate. Oh, for one single day of battle ! That would alter all ! A beardless ensign carries the flaunting silk into the storm of bullets, and comes out a veteran, with the torn flag in his hand. The countless deaths that have respected have aged him in honour and esteem. There be days of fight which count for years of service, not in the Army List alone, but in the common account of men's opinion. No soldiering was afoot in Europe ; but India was a frequent field

of battle. One day of Hindostan might put a badge of manhood on his breast at which old men should bow.

Such were the floating fancies in his mind, which a few chance words were soon to fix. There was no party at the Cransdales on the Thursday; only another cousin besides Royston, one *Katey Kilmore*, god-child and namesake of the Countess. Of course, then, the Under-Secretary gave his arm to Lady Cransdale; Philip his to cousin *Katey*; Ned his, with tremor of delight, to Constance. Poor boy! the dainty white hand on his arm, the hand which had clasped his a thousand times in careless, childish play, now sent a thrill to his heart's core at every touch.

"Phil tells me, Lady Constance, you went to the debate."

He could not keep himself from speaking of what it vexed him sore to think of.

What a strange contrast between "Phil," the old familiar word, and that formal "Lady Constance." Once it had been "Con," and "Phil," and "Ned," at all times; but an awe was creeping over him against which the oldest intimacy could not prevail. She did not seem to notice it.

"Oh, yes; and I liked it wonderfully. I wish it had been in the Commons though."

That was well ; it was not all for Royston's sake she had enjoyed it.

"Why rather in the Commons?"

"Because of the more lively stir and action, to be sure. Great questions are decided there, nine times out of ten. Royston says he wishes his seat were in that House."

This dashed the cup of comfort from his lips, all the more cruelly that the young lord turned at hearing his own name, and looked his pleasure at her giving weight to words of his.

It cost Ned something to continue.

"So you like stir and action?"

"To be sure I do ; don't you?"

"What do you think of soldiering then, Lady Constance?" he next asked, nerving himself as a gambler against his nervousness by calling a higher stake.

"Come, Con," cried her brother, overhearing this, though Ned had not spoken loud, "say your say about soldiering, then we'll have Katey's."

"I don't care for red coats and gold epaulettes, Phil, anyhow ; and bear-skins are my boggies."

"You're a muff, Con," he retorted. "Now Katey, what say you?"

She had one brother in the "Coldstream," and

one hoping for the "Fusiliers," so she cried, "the Guards for ever! Phil."

"Bravo, Katey; you shall be vivandière to our battalion."

Whilst they were laughing at their own fun, Ned said very gravely and quietly to Constance, "of course I didn't mean the Guards, they only play at soldiers now-a-days; but real soldiering in camps and colonies; what do you think of that?"

"Better, at all events; but all soldiering is dangerous idle work in time of peace."

"Not everywhere. Not in India, for instance."

"India, I grant you; that is a field for a man's career. It should be mine if I were one. Soldier, statesman, missionary—there are endless roads to greatness there."

She wondered, as she looked at him, what the rush of blood to his forehead should mean—what the blaze that kindled in his eyes.

"Since when have you thought over Indian careers, pray?"

"Since when have I not, Ned? Have you forgotten that I am a Hindoo girl myself—that dearest pappy's official greatness was all Indian? I have read all his despatches that are in print, and some in manuscript besides, and every book of Indian travel or adventure I can lay my hands upon."

"How strange of me to have forgotten it!" said Ned.

Thereupon he fell into dead silence. She wondered all the more at him. She little knew her sweet lips had spoken doom of exile against a playmate from the cradle. Her wonder did not outlive the day; but thenceforth dated a new manner of intercourse between herself and Ned. Down at Cransdale in the Midsummer holidays, under the cedars at noon tide, on horseback in the long soft evenings, they would hold continuous and grave conversations. Phil voted them prodigious bores. "A talk with you two is about as lively as an hour up to Hawtrey in Thucydides. I wish I'd Katey Kilmore to run wild a bit upon the moor with me."

Boys on their way to manhood will pass through certain heroic moods, such as more callous—shall I say trivial?—elders mock at. Silly scorn! The tone and colour of the finished life-picture may recal but faintly, by-and-by, the prismatic hues of the first "study" for it; the grouping may be strangely varied, the firmest outlines show "repentings," yet each worthiest work must needs retain indelible impress of that first conception.

"Heroic moods, indeed!" say some. "Walking on stilts, you mean: the lad's best friend is he that

soonest brings him to his legs again." "Not if he break them in the bringing down," I say. And I would rather, when the stilts are dropped, see the boys stride, or even strut, than lounge and shuffle.

Scorn boy-heroics or not, good reader, you will agree with me that since a female figure must needs haunt them, it is huge advantage to the man that shall be when its proportions of worth and beauty are truly just and noble—are genuine realities, not figments of his fancy. Come of his green passion what may, 'tis well for him that she who kindles it be one for whose love "a world" were indeed, "well lost." And such was Lady Constance. She was nearly twenty now; her girlish grace and freshness not worn off, but ripening into womanly glories. Two seasons' experience of the great London world had left her untainted, but not undisciplined. Her conversation fed and sustained the loftiest of the lad's aspirations. Had he but counted her as truly sister as she held him brother, all had been well, and this fresh intimacy had proved to him an unalloyed advantage. As it was now, the very mind was saturated with the sweet poison wherewith the heart was sick. But he put strong constraint upon himself, and hid this from her. That would have been perhaps impossible could she but once have

gained a sight of him at distance, so to speak. However, she suspected nothing. He stood as he had always stood—too near.

Those were blissful holidays. No Royston was there to be a fly in amber. His very triumph had brought him tribulation. His department had to undergo remodelling in virtue of the very Bill that he had helped to pass, and he was chained to his Under-Secretary's desk. School-days were over, too, for good and all. Neither Phil nor Ned was to return next half to Eton. The former expected his commission daily, the latter was entered at Christchurch. That troubled him, however, so there was a fly in his amber after all. His repugnance against any but a soldier's career grew daily, yet he had not imparted it to his father—a second cause of inward disquiet.

His reserve on this one point was foreign to all their life-long relation to one another, a new growth, not rooted in any strange undutifulness or new mistrust; but only in excessive tenderness and lingering self-devotion. He must not follow the promptings of a dream, pushing him out of the beaten track of duty. How could an Indian soldier—gone in quest of name and fame, to find both or neither, perhaps on a field of death—play an only son's part to such dear parents in their quiet En-

glish home? What vexed him most in brooding on his love for Lady Constance was this double-facedness. Sometimes it seemed the essence of unselfishness, it won him so far out of his inner self; sometimes it seemed a selfishness in quintessence, so utterly did it seduce him into forgetfulness of them. And when either parent spake, as parents will, of that coming Oxford life to which he could not feel heartily resigned, he hated the half-hypocrisy which shut his lips or opened them with words of little meaning.

Robert Locksley took little notice of such symptoms of inner conflict as might have been perceptible in the outward bearing of his son; nor would perception have set him on conjecture. Ned's confidence was certain to be given him in good time; no fear of that. But meek-hearted Lucy had more misgivings: meek hearts look out at clear eyes oftentimes. She would not question, she could hardly bear to watch him, and thus indicate or even entertain suspicion against his trust in her. But it is hard to keep a mother's hungry watchfulness of love from off her only one. Following with delicate acuteness the boy's dreamiest glances, her own glance found itself carried, more than once, into a corner of the sitting-room, where the grandfather's sword hung. The blue steel seemed to pierce her

own heart then. She thought of last year at Freshet, how quick and close an intimacy had sprung up between her son and the old soldier, how Ned had relished his campaigning stories, grave or gay. But she could hardly bring herself to accept that interpretation of her boy's unrest. His will had ever been too steadfast, his very fancy too self-controlled to be moved lightly to some novel scheme of life.

CHAPTER VI.

PASSING years bring growth and development to sons of peasants as of peers. Tommy Wilmot also was bordering upon man's estate. He, likewise, had his ambitions and aspirations after a dreamy future. His good father hoped, I doubt not, that he would succeed himself as gardener at the Lodge, just as at the Lodge, Mr. Locksley looked to Ned's succeeding him in the agency of the estate. But Tommy's mind was gone afield like Ned's, only there was in his case, neither reluctance nor inward struggle.

"I wun't have nuffin to do wi' spades and rakes, veyster, no longer nor I can help, mind." Such had been his early and loud determination. "Vur and vethers vor I, veyster, none o' yer cabbige and lattices!"

To be a "kipper," even undermost of "under-
kippers," was his practical desire. In its tricksiest

moments fancy would conjure up a long green vista of over-arching trees, a barn-door studded with clenched carcasses of stoats and weasels, hawks and pies; a comfortable house, with kennels appurtenant, hencoops upon a green sward, with clucking hens and pheasant poult by dozens pecking ant-eggs; and, moving about among them, a sturdy figure in velveteens and leather leggings—no longer “Tommy,” but “Muster” Wilmot, “head-kipper” of Cransdale Park! And, oh, John Wilmot, gardener, progenitor of Tom, to think all that should come—all those wild aspirations, and their lawless venting—from an honest innocent desire of thine, that Lucy Locksley, thy meek mistress, should fill jam-pots by the dozen with currant-jelly!

“Them blackbirds and thrushes wun’t lave us narra mossel o’ vruit to year! There, Tommy, buoy, couldn’t ‘ee manage to vire thic roosty gun?”

Fire it, indeed! There was a pie baked soon in the gardener’s oven, wherein the “four-and-twenty blackbirds” of the nursery rhyme might have been counted when it “was opened;” but if they “began to sing,” it was in Tommy’s ears only; siren songs, for all they were no water-birds, decoying Tommy’s youthful yearnings into woody coverts where birds breed. Not blackbirds only, nor missel-thrushes;

but long-tailed pheasants and plump partridges. Rabbits burrow there likewise, and hares crouch in form.

Dread Nemesis of the blackbirds!

Oh, John Wilmot, gardener! Was there not wilfulness, like unto Tommy's, rife in thee? Zeal for "Missus's" jam-pots might have been very well, had not the murderous manifestation of it against the sweet-throated pilferers been made in flagrant disobedience to her will.

"A pound of currants more or less, John, cannot signify. I never grudge them to the blackbirds. Don't scare the pretty creatures, banging at them."

So said meek-hearted Lucy; but John shook his head, and all the answer that he gave was that suggestion to Tommy, when she was out of hearing:

"Couldn't 'ee manage to vire thic roosty gun?"

It became his fetish, that rusty fire-arm—soon no longer rusty. With affectionate pride and care, with tow and train-oil, and rottenstone, he worked up its old steel at last to brighter than silvery polish. "Muster Watson," the present incumbent of the "head-kipper's" benefice, was not a man to favour or to wink at any boy's possession of fire-arms on the estate.

"I can't abide to see them 'crow kippers' wi'

guns, my lord," he often said to Philip. " Scarecrows is too much neglected ; then there's clappers as makes a very pretty noise, my lord, and is safer than guns for little chaps now, as I allays tells them farmers."

But the precincts of the Lodge garden were sacred, and Tommy's possession, within those limits, undisturbed. Nay, there were Saturnalia, rook-shooting for instance, or when great flights of "queaties" or wood-pigeons, were blazed at in the woods ; when Tommy, bold, but with misgiving, would risk his all, and venture, gun in hand, within eyeshot of "Muster Watson." In those early days, he himself eyed that great man with veneration rather than defiance. It really went against his grain to elude his observation ; he could have wished to carry gun and shot-belt in his presence openly, with that proud submission where-with worthy subalterns wait on the bidding of a truly noble chief. Upon under-keepers, even upon occasional watchers, he still looked as a spirited cadet might upon tried lieutenants of his corps. He was fraternal even with mere beaters when the coverts were shot in later autumn, and had carried an ash stick, not without distinction, in their ranks. All minor sporting servitudes were reckoned offices of honour and of love. It was no

mean pleasure to bear the bag of ferrets when my lord and Master Ned went rabbiting; supreme felicity to follow with the landing-net, and to officiate at the securing of a two-pound trout. Oh, foolish father, John! Why thwart so pronounced and so promising a call?

"There, I bees a gardener, and the son of a gardener, and I wants to be veyther to a gardener too."

But Tommy shook his head, and reiterated his declaration:

"None o' yer cabbige and lattices for I."

Jane Wilmot, his mother, was for a compromise, of which the terms were wide; all but one article, which was close and stringent. Imbued with the wisdom of that folk lore, which tells that horses led to ponds, cannot, therefore, be made to drink, she was urgent with her John, that their Tommy should not be forced to follow the horticultural career of his sire. He was a smart lad, and could "turn his hand a'most to anythin'; let him try it on any other callin' as he can gi' his mind to." Any other, that is, save one.

Jane was a "kipper's" daughter, and a "kipper's" sister; and was so far from having her good man's love of caste, as to dread above all things becoming a "kipper's" mother. Well she

might, poor woman! She was not from the Cransdale county at all. She had been born and bred in one where society was split into two hostile factions, of game-keepers and game-stealers. There, in every grassy field, staked thorn-bushes gave token of defence against the sweep of poaching-nets. There mastiffs and bloodhounds fetched high prices as savage and sagacious helpers to such as must track or encounter nightly depredators. There one magistrate after another was continually "retiring from the bench during the hearing of this case," to let his impartial brethren condemn "a trespasser in pursuit of game" on his grounds, returning to sit in judgment on the next case, committed on the grounds of his brother magistrate, who, in his turn, "retired."

There, the lower class of public-houses in the purlieus of county towns saw formidable conspiracies against the game on this or that estate, knit among groups of dissolute, and often desperate, men. There, not seldom, whole bands of these associated plunderers would sweep the country-side, and grimly defy the protective forces of the squires. Jane Wilmot well remembered the sickening anxiety which looked ever and anon out of her own mother's haggard eyes. She well remembered how often, wakened by the soughing of the wind upon nights

when murky clouds went scudding across the moon, she had lain in her childish crib, gazing at the white figure which sat with folded arms by the hearthstone, starting at the cry of every night-bird, jumping up and crossing the room a-tiltœ—lest she should waken the waking child—peering out through the lattice into the half darkness, venturing even sometimes to unbolt the door and raise the latch, and put out her head, and make sure that no sound of terror was borne upon the night wind.

But Jane remembered worse than this. The events of one fatal night were stamped with minute and terrible distinctness upon the tablets of her brain. That was the night when her sleep was broken suddenly, not by the long moan of the wind in the cottage chimney, nor by its hurtling rush among the tree-tops; but by the loud and sharp report of fire-arms in the thicket hard by. Angry bark of dogs, and angrier shouts of men, mingled in wild confusion. Then came an agonising scream, distinct and piercing, above all the mingled noise. The mother, who was standing upright in her night-gown—her heavy black hair, streaked with gray, hanging loose upon her shoulders—changed her look of racking eagerness to one of blank dismay, clasped her hands together bitterly, and sank into the arm-chair by the hearth:

"Oh, Jenny, Jenny ! yon scream was our Bill's!"

The mother-heart's foreboding was too true. Four men soon brought in a ghastly corpse, whose whole left side seemed to have been torn away by the heavy charge of shot poured into it at close quarters from the muzzle of the poacher's gun. The agony upon the white face of the murdered man was a fearful thing to look upon ; but not so fearful, Jane thought even then—and thought continually in after years—as the horror and the hate, the misery and the vengefulness, which could be read plainer than printed words upon her father's face, as he came in behind his dead son.

Since then Jane had lived for years in the quiet Cransdale district, where such tragedies were happily unknown—were poaching offences were peccadilloes, never crimes—where Muster Watson and his subordinates were in no danger of losing life in game preserving, otherwise than by having it "worritted out o' them by them poachin' chaps," as that functionary would often lament that his hard case was. But the haunting impressions of early childhood were not weakened by succeeding years. "Keeperin' and poachin'" were equally her dread and aversion. She went along with John in forbidding her son to indulge his sporting propensities in the legitimate way, and was as blind as he to the

danger of throwing the lad back upon the unlawful alternative for their indulgence.

I do not plead this opposition of his parents in excuse for Tommy, but state the facts; for upon that unlawful alternative, it must be confessed, he did fall back. His offences were tenderly dealt with by Watson, when occasionally detected, partly from consideration for his parents, partly from the known good-will towards the lad of my lord and Master Ned. Yet the head-keeper would purse his mouth and shake his head, and say how much he feared John Wilmot's lad wouldn't "come to no good neither arter all."

Intricate is the woof of human life. All Mr. Watson's indulgence to Tommy's infractions of statutes for protection to game and fish, did not avail to save him from a serious scrape. Old school rivalries, and the institution of a county police, brought the thing about.

Jim Hutchins was Tommy's schoolmate at the "National" in the old days, when he got the bag of marbles from Master Ned in satisfaction for his wounded feelings in the matter of William Tell. There was a close contest between the two boys in school and out, for mental and for physical mastery. It was a fair match mentally, and they took each other "down" in class turn and turn about.

Physically the advantage lay at first with Hutchins, who was a full year older than his adversary ; but he was a spindle-shanked youth, and as he shot upwards lost his superiority over Tommy Wilmot, whose active, sturdy build gained strength as surely as the other's lost it year by year. Presently their fights degenerated into simple threshings administered by Tommy as occasion arose, and Jim was driven to call in his "big brother" to redress the balance of power. He certainly did turn the tables upon the aggressor, but at cost of so much effort that Wilmot conceived the hope of being "square wi' un" at some future day.

Before that day dawned the great institution of rural police had found its way into the secluded neighbourhood of Cransdale. Jim's big brother donned the blue coat with lead button, and girt his wrist with the striped cuff of authority. Thenceforth he figured in the local journal as that efficient and active officer, P. C. Hutchins, and regarded Tommy—whose delinquencies by flood and field were but too well known to him—with official reprehension, spiced by personal antipathy.

It was no wonder, therefore, that upon a certain morning, during the course of that memorable last vacation, the Earl should appear in the breakfast-

parlour at the Lodge, and thus accost young Locksley :

“ I say, Ned, Tommy Wilmot’s been at it again. He’s in the Cranston lock-up, and likely to go to gaol at St. Ivo’s, unless matters can be mended.”

“ What matters, Phil?”

“ Peeler Hutchins’s head, among the foremost; that’s the most material object broken.”

“ What’s he broken Hutchins’s head for?”

“ Can’t exactly say; but I heard what he broke it with, and you may guess by that.”

“ Well, what was the weapon?”

“ The butt-end of a fishing rod.”

“ The old story—‘ Fur, feather, and scales’—will bring Tommy to permanent grief some fine morning. Why don’t you make an under-keeper of him, Phil, and give him his swing in a lawful way?”

“ Why don’t I, indeed! All along of your turnip-headed old John and Jane, that won’t hear of it, else we’d have had him under Watson years ago. Tell you what, Mr. Locksley, I hope you’ll take warning yourself, and not thwart Ned’s inclinations here if he takes to gibbing, and starting from a regular professional line after all.”

“ Ned won’t play pranks, never fear!” said his father, smiling.

He knew not what a bounding pang went through the lad's heart as he lightly uttered the words.

"Well, we must ride over, I suppose, and see about plastering the peeler's head with a five-pound note, and bailing out Tommy, or something; for his mother's been up to mine as tearful as Niobe, and I promised to do what I could for him. Come along, Ned; I ordered horses round."

"The worst of those perpetual poaching scrapes," said Mr. Locksley, "is, that one never knows how far astray they mayn't lead a lad. Tommy's a good fellow at bottom, I believe; but I'm afraid of his going to the bad at last. Can't you 'list him in your battalion when you join, my lord, and take him out of harm's way down here altogether?"

"He's three inches under our standard," answered Philip, as they went out; "and not likely to grow much more, I fear."

Tommy they found sulky, if sorrowful, in durance vile. The inspector and the head-keeper had both visited him, endeavouring, in vain, to persuade him into repentance and submission. As to the cracked crown of P. C. Hutchins, it was worse than useless to dilate upon that feature in the case. Mention of it served only to spirit up the culprit.

"I've a paaid off that 'ere 'Uchins any 'ows!"

He was somewhat softened, when my lord him-

self and Master Ned were ushered into his place of confinement, announcing themselves as having ridden over to try and effect a compromise. The fact that the pilfered trout were my lord's, put on an uglier aspect in the eye of conscience.

But when Philip suggested that an ample apology to the policeman was an indispensable preliminary to negotiations, he relapsed into savage sulkiness.

"That is a good 'un. That 'ere 'Utchins spiles my fishin', puts I in quod ; and now I'se to pologise to he ! No, my lord, not if I know it ; there now !"

"For shame, Tommy ! The man did his duty, as you would in his place, or you're not the man I take you for."

"Policeman !" said the Earl, "I am ashamed to think an old acquaintance of mine, whose father and mother I have known ever since I can remember, isn't man enough to own he's in the wrong when he knows it. As Wilmot won't apologise himself to you, I hope you'll take an apology from me for him."

"Now don't 'ee, my lord ; don't 'ee, now !" almost whimpered Tommy, whom this unexpected move of Philip's confounded utterly ; "I beant a going to stand that 'ere; I beant. Tell 'ee what,

perleeceman, I 'umbly ax your pardin, so as my lord wun't: and if five shillin' 'ood goo fur a 'pology' now—"

"There now, Thomas, there now; that will do," quoth Hutchins, in whose breast pocket was crackling a crisp new bank-note of the Earl's. "We won't take no further notice of it, not for this once; but don't you let us see you here again, no more, Thomas, like a good lad now."

P. C. Hutchins was kickably pompous as he uttered this exhortation. Tommy winced, but contained himself.

"That's good advice of the Peeler's, notwithstanding, Tommy," said Philip to him outside, as the liberated captive held his stirrup at mounting.

"Better to give nor take, my lord. There, them live critters is like bird-lime to I; I'se always at 'em, though I 'aint no right to be. And I'm sure I don't mean no offence to 'ee a killin' of them wot's yours, my lord."

"Well, I wish we could let you stick to them in the way of business, Tommy, to keep you out of harm; but your father won't hear of it, nor your mother either."

"No! wuss luck, my lord!" said Tommy.

"Mr. Locksley said this morning, I had better

take you soldiering along with me ; but you're not tall enough for the Guards, you know."

" I've thought o' takin' a sergeant's shillin' scores o' times, I has ;" and he touched his hat as Philip and Locksley rode away.

" Fine stroke that, Phil," said the latter, " bringing him to his knees by apologising for him."

" True for you, Ned ; but it's only a copy. Her ladyship brought me round out of a towering tantrum that way once."

" I say, Phil ; we've had just about a brace of mothers, eh ?"

" Just about, indeed ! Fellows talk of being tied to mammy's apron strings. There's one more of mine's to be cut when I join. Well, the snip of the scissors will make my heart bleed. Whoop !"

In went the spurs. Both boys were glad of the long smooth stretch of turf which gave excuse for a furious gallop.

" What a thundering shame ! Such weather as this !" cried Ned, when they pulled up, after " taking" the sunk fence into the park. They rode home at a foot's pace, under the shady trees.

" Shall you dine with us ?" said Philip, as the other was presently turning down towards the Lodge.

"No; they expect me home this afternoon to dine early."

"Well, walk up later in the evening. You haven't seen her ladyship or 'Con' to-day."

CHAPTER VII.

ON the western side of Cransdale House was a slope of ground never subjected to the tyranny of terrace-makers. In that unkempt corner their childish gardens had been made, in the moss and among bushes. Such flower-beds as Constance had occasionally laid out had been cut by cabbage plots, and variegated by young cucumbers, grown under cracked tumblers. Whole tracts had been given up at times to the cultivation of milk thistles for the rabbits. So-called cavalry charges from the romping boys had periodically trampled all into a wilder confusion, and certain spots had been charred and blackened by bivouac fires, lighted to roast birds' eggs. Varied styles of savage architecture had been attempted there ; African huts, when they first read Mungo Park—Huron wigwams, when

presently they made acquaintance with Fenimore Cooper.

By and by the long absences of the boys at school brought lengthened periods of sole occupation, and a title began to grow to exclusive possession. "Our" garden became "mine;" and change of name confirmed restricted ownership in "Constance's corner." As its fair owner grew, not only in grace and beauty, but in the sense of them, so grew her corner in the expression of both. Trees and shrubs, ferns and flowers, all there were choicest of the choice, some for exquisite rarity, some for loveliest simplicity.

At the summit of the slope was a carpeting of softest moss, on which showed the chiselled lip of a smooth white marble basin. A jet of water shooting skywards against the west seemed to Ned to fall back in a spray of living gems, as he came up the sward, and caught, far off in the stillness, the plash of its murmurous music. As he walked and watched the dancing crystal, a figure came across the sky line. It stood between him and the sunset, looking out upon it. Intercepting thus the light it seemed carven in dark porphyry; but for an iridescence, as of gleaming opal, made by the slanting sunbeams along its faultless outline. She stood, with one foot on the mossy carpet, the other

poised on the marble rim. At that distance he could not tell exactly what was the motion of her hands; but it seemed to him that from time to time she dropped something into the water. In simple truth, her taper fingers, as those of thoughtful, or of thoughtless maidens will, were rifling a gathered rosebud and showering down its leaves. Soon she went forward, and over the slope, away. Ned, quick as thought, pressed upward from the other side. He reached the spot. Her footprint was yet fresh upon the moss. He knelt down and kissed it passionately twice or thrice, gathered a few shreds of the moss where his lips had touched her footmark; picked a few floating rose-leaves from the water, and put both tenderly into his breast.

“Ned!”

He turned at the dear voice of one who was almost his mother too. Lady Cransdale sat on a marble seat close by, where she had been in conversation with her daughter.

“Ned! dear Ned! Come here, and let me know at once what meaning there is in what I have just seen you do?”

So he sat down beside her, and forced himself to speak, and told her what it meant, in the simplest, strongest words that he could find. He was so frank

and manly, in his genuine and deep emotion, that it cut her to the quick; for she dearly loved the lad. Her long-lost Philip's early tenderness for him, her own obedient adoption of it, all her indulgent motherliness in proof—to think that all should end in having toiled him thus! The meshes were self-wrought, perhaps; but what of that? She felt that they were wrought in with living fibres of a true loving heart. No unravelling was possible; they must be rent. Her mournful firmness was the only consolation she could give him. She put on no idle affectation that his hurt was slight: she was no fool to think nor hypocrite to feign it. She had known and loved him all his life long as a boy, and had held him, up to that hour, for no more. But when he had opened out his heart in its honesty, she saw and owned him for a man—with a man's capacity to suffer, she prayed it might be with a man's strength to bear.

“ You have been dreaming, Ned. So, indeed, have I; dreaming or blind. But open your eyes as mine are open now, and see for yourself that you have dreamt what cannot be.”

“ What cannot be? You say so, too! I have said it myself a thousand times, but would not—could not, keep to it.”

It was moonlight by this time, and Lady Crans-

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dale saw the figure of Constance returning in search of her. She took her determination in an instant.

"I say, dear Ned, you have dreamt what cannot be. You may mistrust me, for I too was blind. But here comes Constance. I will leave you face to face with her. I trust you to speak out as manfully to her as you have done to me; and I trust her for the answer she will give."

She was gone before Constance reached them.

"You here, Ned!" She held out her hand and clasped his, so sisterly, that he foreknew his fate.

He held her's firm, and turned her gently, that the moonlight might come full upon her features; then he looked her in the face, and said:

"Tell me, dear Lady Constance, can you think of ever loving me?"

"Loving you, Ned? Of course I can. I do love you with all my heart. You know I do—as I have always done."

The calm of her voice convinced him. He dropped her hand, and covered his face with both his own, lest she should see the anguish on it. Then the shock went through her that something was strangely wrong with him.

"Ned—brother Ned! Mine and Phil's. What ails you? Speak to me!"

"Oh, Constance! you will think me mad. It is

that word ‘brother’ hurts me. I have no sister but yourself; yet it is not brother’s love with which I love you—heart and soul, out of all speech, sweet Constance.”

Ah! she understood him now; and her heart, as her mother’s, was pierced through with pity; because, in very truth, she did love him as a brother.

“Lady Cransdale says that I have dreamt a dream; and that you will tell me true whether or not it is a dream of what cannot be. I know it cannot. But let me hear it from your own lips, Constance. Say, it cannot!

Her’s was a strong soul too, though very tender. Every syllable thrilled clear.

“No, dear brother Ned, it cannot.”

“Then forgive me. But before I go, seal the grave of my dead hope, in token of forgiveness, with a kiss.”

She knew his nobleness, and trusted him to know her own. He would understand, once and forever, that only upon a grave could she consent to put such seal so freely. So, as he knelt before her, she stooped and put a kiss upon his forehead. He spoke not another word; but rose, and walked rapidly down from the slope over the moonlit sward; and she watched him as he went.

All that sultry summer's night his own mother that bare him, Lucy Locksley, lay awake. It was late when he came in. Prayers were over, and she had gone to her own room. He opened the door as he passed, and kissed her hurriedly, and said "good night." And she had only said, "God bless you, dearest!" but she had noted upon his features a handwriting of some strange grief to be spelt out on the morrow: so she lay sleepless, guessing at sadness. The nightingale sang all night. Lucy wondered whether it were a mere conceit of poets that the melodious complaint was for a nest left empty. But when the morning birds began to pipe—the thrush and ouzel—their very joyousness was wearisome, she fell into a short sleep, whence she awoke unrefreshed and anxious.

Ned was not at breakfast. The servants said he must be gone fishing. No one had seen him go, but his rod and basket were missing in the hall.

Presently was heard a man's footstep craunching the gravel outside the open windows of the breakfast-parlour.

"Ned back again," said Locksley, without looking up from his *Times*; "I thought it was nonsense fishing such a sunshiny morning."

The mother smiled to think her husband's ear should be so dull.

"That's not the dear boy's footstep, Robert. How can you think so?"

It was not. Through the window, which opened to the ground, Philip marched in, followed by a long-bodied terrier, whose tangled hair hid all his legs, and moving as he went, gave him the look of a monster centipede.

"Morning, Mrs. Locksley. How nice and cool you are in here. It's grilling hot outside already. Morning, Mr. Locksley. Where's Ned?"

"Gone fishing early."

"Early! He'd better; unless he went before sunrise he might as well have stayed to fish in the teacups. What a nuisance! It's now or never with those rats."

"Rats?" cried Lucy.

"Yes, they are taking up the barn flooring at the Home-Farm to-day. It's full of them. And my new Skye, here, is to show his talents for the first time on the 'varmint.' Isn't he charming, Mrs. Locksley? He only came last night. Macphail, a fellow in our form at Eton, sent him down from the island direct. Ned hasn't seen him yet. Why didn't he come up to the house last night? he said he would."

"Why, surely he was up there till long past ten," said Lucy.

"I never set eyes on him, at all events. No, sir," to Skye, begging with a bit of dry toast upon his nose; "how dare you! There now, good dog —catch! Ned grown mysterious, Mrs. Locksley?" She made no answer. After a few more dry-toast exercises, Philip and Skye marched out again at the same open window. Locksley soon went off to his daily duties, and Lucy was left to brood over her undefined apprehensions.

Her household orders given and arrangements made, she was again in the cool breakfast parlour, working at a piece of embroidered muslin, when she heard another lighter step on the gravel. Her quick ear knew it at once for Lady Cransdale's. Something on the face of the countess told of a weighty matter on her mind, and, the first trivial salutation over, she asked, in obedience to an irresistible impulse :

"Did you see Ned last night, Lady Cransdale?"

"I did, indeed, my dear, dear, Mrs. Locksley."

As they sat down together on the sofa, the countess took both Mrs. Locksley's hands in hers; and meek-hearted Lucy, seeing more plainly some grave sorrow in her friend's eyes, trembled and grew faint.

"Tell me, dear Lady Cransdale, what has happened? Philip was here just now, and said that

Ned was not up at the house last night. He came in late, and only spoke a word with me. This morning he was out before any one was up."

"Dear Mrs. Locksley, dear Lucy, my old friend, that has happened which I should, yet scarcely could, have foreseen. Last night the poor boy confided to me that he has set his heart, not boyishly but with a great love, upon Constance. A sad thing, indeed!"

Lucy's meek heart was human, and had, as other human hearts, its own mysterious inconsistencies. It gave a bound within, which sent the red blood angry to her forehead. She drew her hands with quick motion from between those of the countess, and fixed on her a look of almost startling fierceness.

"A sad thing? Pray, for whom?"

"For Ned," said Lady Cransdale, firmly, though sympathizing fully with the roused heart of a mother.

"Lady Constance is very nobly born, my lady; she is very beautiful; she will be very rich—at least"—and there was a tremulous scorn in Lucy's voice—"at least, compared with such folk as we. But our Ned, Lady Cransdale"—

"Is worthy—that is, he will be—of any girl, however noble, fair, or good. I count the wealth for nothing:" broke in the countess. Fine mother-

soul! She would not take offence at Lucy's sudden loftiness; but loved her all the more for her passionate pride in the boy.

"Why do you say he will be? What is wanting to his worth?" said Lucy, not yet disarmed.

"Years only, my dear friend! Ah, do not be unjust to me by thinking I would be unjust to our Ned. For he is ours. You let me love him from his cradle. I cannot forget it, nor be ungrateful for it, trust me."

The power of a soft answer to turn away wrath wrought upon Lucy; the anger died in part out of her eyes.

"If Constance had a younger sister," continued Lady Cransdale, "on whom he should have set his heart, it might have been otherwise."

"Age does not always go by almanac," the other answered.

"No! but Constance is a full ripe woman, mind and body. Ned will be a true man, I would pledge my life. But he himself asks time and scope to prove his manhood."

"What time? What scope?" cried Lucy, with a new flush of increased excitement. "What has he told you that he has never breathed to me? I saw the unquiet of his heart, and dreaded a confidence to come. But I am robbed, it seems, of the first

place in his trust as in his love." She said it with returning bitterness.

"No, Lucy, no. He did well to keep his secret, in generous delicacy, even from yourself. I surprised it, and forced from his honesty what I shall tell you now." Then she told her how the lad had dreamt, among other things, of snatching premature distinction upon a military field.

"Then is my doom sealed," said Lucy; "I have lost my son."

She folded her hands upon her lap, and fixed her gaze as if to look out into the far years to come.

Lady Cransdale still sat beside her; but for a space neither woman ventured upon a word. Little by little the widowed lady's eyes began to fill with tears. The strange quiet of Lucy, and the strong constraint she put upon herself, seemed to weaken the governance of her friend's will over her own emotions. She gave a sob at last; and when the other heard it, she turned round and said:

"Leave me, dear Lady Cransdale; I shall have to beg your pardon for that and for my former abruptness—but I cannot just now."

So she kissed Lucy and went out.

And then the wounded mother rose up from her seat, and went walking to and fro, her arms folded on her breast; but ever and anon unfolding to let

her hands twitch, with convulsive motion at her throat. She did not cry. She could not; but the passionate beat that flushed her to the forehead, seemed to gather and glow round the orbits of her so gentle eyes.

“They have robbed him of his brave heart’s love; and now they say, ‘how sad for him!’ Sad for me, too! But what of that? Oh, my poor boy. My Ned! Yes, mine, ‘Ours,’ she said; but I say mine, my Ned; not ours!”

“Not ours! not ours! What are you saying, darling wife? What moves you?” asked that only one voice dearer than even her dear boy’s.

“Ah, my own Robert! Yes, with you I will say ‘ours;’ our own poor Ned!”

She threw her arms about the father’s neck, and laid her head upon his breast, and clung there, and gave way, and shook, as the tears rained down.

He would not break her grief with any question or foolish exclamation of surprise, but let this strange storm sweep across the unaccustomed sky of his Lucy’s even temper. Presently he drew her towards the sofa, where they both sat down, his arm around her, her hands in his, and the dear head upon his shoulder still.

Then, of her own accord, she told him, almost

word for word, what had been said between the countess and herself.

"And now, my own dear husband, promise me this one thing. By all the love which knits us, either to other, and both to our only child, promise me not to thwart him!"

"Not to thwart him, my sweet wife! What power have you or I to thwart or humour him in this? We cannot give him Lady Constance. His heart, poor boy, must wean itself from her. There is no help for it."

"Yes, I suppose—that is, I know—well, yes! Ah, my poor Ned!—it must. But do not let us make the weaning harder, Robert, dear."

"The Lord forbid! I don't quite understand you, Lucy."

"Yes, yes, you surely must. This is a double secret, and we hold both threads now."

"How so, a double secret?"

"Yes, a double longing. One for this Lady Constance who thinks light of him. It will be long before she finds another such to love her, Robert!"

"Well, Lucy; but the second?"

"For the life of a soldier."

"No, dearest, surely not. He has done very well at Eton. He will do well at Oxford. This

soldiering was but a means to an impossible end, which he would not own for such, poor fellow!"

"Robert, do not deceive yourself; but look there, in the corner: what do you see there?"

"See? Nothing but my father's regulation sword."

"And that is everything. I could not tell what ailed the boy these many days. And yet I caught his looks upon the sword a dozen times."

"It was a chisel only," said her husband, smiling sadly, "with which to carve a pedestal for his fair idol. The idol broken, no more need of pedestal."

Lucy gave back the sad smile, yet with a woman's archness who smiles at a man's clumsiness in guessing heart-riddles.

"Idols are easier broken than the hope of them. Empty pedestals seem to promise that something shall stand upon them yet. But you spoke of weaning. One must wean upon some kind of food. Such a spirit as Ned's will hunger ten times more for action and adventure now."

"I had not thought of that, dearest; perhaps it may. But Ned's is a dutiful and loving spirit. He will not leave us lightly."

The sad smile was still upon her countenance; but a subtle change came over it. Through its

sadness gleamed a strange exultation: its sorrow irradiated by some mystic joy. The father loved his boy well—loved him better than life. But Lucy was his mother. The self-sacrificing mystery of mother-love was hers. Initiation in it, pangs of motherhood alone can purchase. Her sad smile was not arrogant, and yet it was a smile of conscious triumph; for the sense was on her of that supremacy in love, which it is a woman's joy to find so real, seeing how dear her weaker nature buys it.

"Yes, Robert, we have a dutiful and loving son. Love and duty might teach him to make a costly sacrifice. But it is anticipated. We have made it. For you will make it with me, dearest Robert. Perhaps he would not leave us of himself; but we will bid him go."

Meekness is not one with weakness—who thinks so, greatly errs. The man's manliness reeled at the shock which came so mighty from the meek heart of his wife.

"Bid the boy go, dear Lucy; bid him go! Send him away? Send Ned away, and with him all the fond hopes we have had of him?"

Great beads of tears stood in his eyes, and then came rolling down; and then his great sobs shook him. She put her gentle hands upon his shoul-

ders and seemed to steady the strong frame that quivered.

"Just so, dear Robert, we will forego the fond hopes *we* have had of him. Remember, they were not his but ours. Why clutch them selfishly? We had our own hopes of ourselves, and have found them true in one another. Let him seek his, and pray God he may find them no more false than we have done!"

He folded her to his breast, and pressed her to his heart, as on the first day they were wed.

"We will make his hopes ours, my own Robert. We will not let him know but what ours are his."

Oh, mighty mother-love, and mighty consciousness of might!

She forbore to ask a promise, to entreat or plead. But in the silence made full conquest of her husband's will.

He pressed her once more to his breast, and kissed her tenderly, and said :

"You are his mother, Lucy. I can have but one heart with yourself in this as in all else on earth. Do as you think best, love, and the good Lord comfort us."

CHAPTER VIII.

NED meanwhile was up upon the moorland. Waking from feverish and broken sleep to heaviness of heart, the thought of the fresh wilderness had beckoned him out. Mindful of his mother's possible anxiety, he had taken with him his fishing-rod and basket, that their absence might account for his. It was so early, and he went so fast, that the whin bushes had not yet caught a single gilding beam when he had reached the higher levels.

"Ex oriente lux," he said, as the bright sun rim came up on the horizon. "After sunset one looks eastward for another sunrise. So must I."

Then his heart smote him to think that facing eastwards he had put his home behind him. So he turned to look back on it; but his treacherous eyeshot swerved and struck—not upon the eaves under

which his mother's head was pillow'd; but upon the pinnacles of Cransdale House.

"A man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall—" No, boy, no. Not even if they reckoned thee a man. Art thou not even yet awake from that dream of what cannot be?

A flush of anger heated him. Without looking upon the house where he was born, he turned right round again, and walked over the moor, scanning eagerly its blue-brown ridges. That is no longer one of them on which his eye rests at last. Yon long level line is surely not a line of straggling moorland bushes? Those are the tree-tops of some long formal avenue—the great avenue at Rookenhamb.

He set his teeth and looked about him. Amidst the big boulders, between which the moorland stream came foaming, he spied a large, flat stone, so massive that he had much ado to raise it at arms' length above his head. And yet he hurled it with such force against one of those smooth-pated boulders that it shivered into fragments, one of which struck and cut him on the rebound. His excitement was too fierce to let him feel the cut. When blood began to trickle on his forehead he thought it water, splashed up in his face by the shivered stone. He went striding up-stream

moodily, making savage cuts with his fishing-rod at tall thistles, or other lusty weeds.

Was this the same lad that had borne himself so gently with Lady Cransdale and her daughter overnight?

'The very same. A young man's heart is fitful in its waywardness. And he was in a wilderness alone. He that is so may often encounter with a fiend. So on he went, the hot sun baking into clots the blood upon his angry forehead. He saw a trout basking in a quiet basin, shut out from the brawling stream by two big stones. He hurled his rod, in wanton wrath, at it so violently, that as the creature turned its side it showed a murderous rent among the flashing scales.

Butcherly done, not soldierly, Ned! In outrage of the laws of sport—the mimic war!

But his anger burnt fiercely; and still he struck out savagely with the rod at every tall weed or flower as he went along.

He that will not wrestle with the tempter in the wilderness is driven of him. It was going ill with Edward until he encountered an angel and minister of grace in the strangest and most unlikely form.

He had reached a spot upon the course of the stream where the ground made an abrupt rise, above which the water was swollen by the inflow of two

lesser burns, and so came tumbling in a miniature cataract over the fall. Beneath it rose, in front, a solitary shaft of stone, squared as if by human hands, and set up in mid-stream. It was known as the Pixie's pillar to the folk of the country-side. To reach it required the nicest equilibrium; for the neighbouring stones stood at a steeper dip, showing only thinnest edges, or tooth-like points above the water which eddied wildly round, or formed deep pools on either side. The capital of this strange natural pillar was a platform some three feet square, at such a sharp incline that it required the sure foot of a goat to stand on it; over all waved a little rowan ash rooted in the fissures of the stone. About its slender trunk a child had twined its left arm, and was grasping with the right hand at green berries on the outer boughs hung over the basin into which the tumbling waters fell. Ned fairly sickened to see the sapling bend with the child's weight, and sway to and fro with its eager outstretch. Its face was from him, and he did not dare to call, lest the rash little one, startled by the sudden cry, should lose its hold. Putting together two joints of his fishing rod, he advanced with its help as far along the chancy stepping stones as he could make his footing good; there he waited till the child's face should turn his way. But the outmost bunch of

berries seemed to have fascinated the urchin. Loosening the left hand from the trunk, he kept sliding it ever further along a projecting branch, edging his eager feet nearer and nearer to the brink of the steep stone. His finger tips just touched the dangling prize once, and then caught at it again, till the foothold slipped ; and the right hand clutching the same branch with the left, the child hung for a moment at arm's length over the pool.

Ned dashed in. The water was low ; so he found footing under the Pixie's pillar, and caught the urchin in his arms as it fell. It was an impish creature, and made hideous faces at him as he set it down safe upon the bank. Then it burst into fits of hysterical laughter.

"What's your name, little one?" he asked, when this at last subsided.

A vacant stare was the only answer.

"How do they call you boy, then?"

The child opened its mouth wide, and gaped upon him.

"Can't you speak, little boy? Whose child are you?"

"Mammy's."

This was more hopeful ; but it soon appeared to be the whole extent of information to be gained. No questioning, coaxing, wheedling, or threat, could

discover mammy's whereabouts. The more trouble Ned took to extract an answer, the more resolute grew the urchin to give none; indeed, he soon ceased to listen to his questioner or look at him, absorbed in the process of weaving rushes with the right hand between the outspread fingers of the left.

"Here's a pretty fix," thought Ned, as he threw himself also down upon the grass in the full blaze of the sunshine, to dry his clothes dripping from his dash into the pool. "Is the brat sulky or idiotic? And what on earth am I to do with it, anyhow?"

The moorland was wide and wild. He could not think of any village for miles whence the child might have come. He unslung his fishing basket, and threw it carelessly down between himself and his impracticable charge. By and by he remembered the lower joints of his rod which he had thrown away to plunge into the water. He got up and went out upon the stepping-stones to look for it. The child, who had eyed him with stolen glances all along, pounced upon the basket the instant that his back was turned. It held a fly-book and a spare winch. The former was at once tossed aside; the latter, new and bright, excited curiosity and desire. The child began to pull at the end of the coiled line: crrr—whrr—went the winch. What a wondrous and delightful toy!

Having some hazy notion of ownership, and vague apprehension of the dangers of theft, he looked round for Ned, whose back was turned and bent over the stream, out of which he was trying to fish the joints of his rod. The boy started up, hid the reel in his shirt breast, and scampered off.

When Ned turned again, he saw the urchin many hundred yards ahead, running as if for life.

"Cutting home again, I suppose; but there's no knowing, I'd better follow the monkey." So he slung his basket, without missing the winch, and set off at a trot in pursuit.

They ran half a mile at least, the child scudding on before wild and swift as a moorland hare. Presently, in a sudden fold of the ground, appeared a solitary human dwelling, into which it ran.

It was a long low cottage, built of stone-work as if the builders had piled up stones and boulders off the moor without attempt to sort or face, or dress them. The thatch was a mass of ling and heather kept down by heavy stones. There was no upper story; the two rooms, with a sort of barn or cow-shed, being on the ground floor. A plot of stunted cabbages, and of potatoes with weak haulms, were the only signs of cultivation.

When Ned came up, the door of rude oakslabs stood ajar. No voice answered his knocking; so he went in.

The furniture of the kitchen, or keeping-room, was scanty, but very clean. It was, however, in complete disorder, as if the wayward underwitted child had been suffered to work his will upon it. There was a wide open chimney, and a big black iron cooking-pot hung over the white ashes of a dead fire. A small wooden Dutch clock hung in one corner; but its pendulum was still, and its click hushed. On a dresser were the fragments of a loaf apparently broken by the child. A kitten, not given to bread-eating, was sniffing at them, mewing starveling mews. There was an air of desolation over all.

"Holloa here! Any one at home?" cried Ned. Though he could not feel quite sure of it, he thought he heard a feeble answer to his hail.

"Where are you, then?" he cried again; "sing out a bit, if there's any one there!"

"Here, i' bed-room," the voice rejoined, a little louder, though very feeble still.

He pushed open the bed-room door. There was a poor tent bedstead without curtains, whose counterpane, though tossed and tumbled, was scrupulously clean. On the pillow lay the feverish head of a woman, with large dark eyes. In a corner stood a smaller truckle-bed, still more disordered; and down beside it crouched the child—pulling the line again to hear the 'crrr—whrr' of the reel.

"Thank God sum 'un be coom at last!" the

woman said, as Ned went up to the bedside and asked what ailed her. "I thought I should a died afore any one 'ud coom anighst me : and then what 'ud a coom o' Benjy ?"

"So that little fellow is yours, is he ? I couldn't make out from him who his 'mammy' was."

"There, Sir, I knows he aint ezackerly not as other folk's children ; but kind o' lost most times. But there aint no harm in my poor Benjy no how, neither."

"Well, I found him on the Pixie's pillar, off of which he tumbled, and I caught him ; and when he cut away I ran after him, for fear he should get into mischief again."

"God bless 'ee, sir ; He must a sent 'ee, sure enough, to save poor Benjy's life, and, maybe, his mother's. I've a lain here three days wi' a sort o' chill. I wur out a hay makin' a Saturday and wur cotched in thic starm as coom on arternoon, ye mind."

"What, were you out in that thunderstorm ? I can't remember such a downpour this long time."

"'Ees sure, sir ; an' its a main step up here from Rookham ; t'wur in the park we wur haying. I wur that wet and coold afore I gotten our bit o' supper, and gotten Benjy to bed ; there, I wur fit to bite my tongue off wi' my teeth a chatterin'."

"And then, I suppose, it turned to fever heat?"

"Coom all over wi' flushes and hets, till I feeled liker a coal; I wur sort o' wanderin' and light by night."

"And have none of the neighbours been near you?"

"Naighbours! why, bless 'ee, sir, there aint none lives nigher nor the kipper at Rookenham Gate."

"What! have you laid here without medicine, or food, or drink, these three days! Couldn't you send the child down to let some one know how ill you were?"

"That's where 'tis, sir; Benjy's quite sensible-like by times, and 'ull run arrands as well as other children a'most; leastways when he's a mind to 't. But fust he took on a cryin' to see mammy abed so long. Then he wur offended like as she 'udn't bile 'un no 'taters; then he tuk an' started out on the moor, and left I all alone."

"Is there any thing in the house that I can give you," said Ned, in great concern, "before I go down to Rookenham to fetch the doctor? Whom shall I tell about you down there, who'll see to you and the child whilst you're so ill?"

"Well, if you could mak' me a drop o' tea now; but it's troublin' you."

"Oh, confound the trouble ; but there's no fire, you know, and the water will take no end of time to boil ; and it's a good step down into Rookenhamb. I'll tell you what, I'll light a fire, and put the kettle on, and cut down after the doctor whilst it's boiling, eh ?"

"Well do 'ee now ; and God bless 'ee for being kind to a poor widder 'ooman."

Assisted by Master Benjy, who brightened up at what he conceived to be preliminaries for boiling "taters," Ned soon had a blazing fire on the kitchen hearth. He was under some apprehension at leaving the idiot boy in charge, lest he should set fire to the cottage, and bring about a most hideous calamity for his sick mother. But she assured her new-found friend that Benjy might be trusted to tend the fire without danger to himself or her.

"And when ye've warned the doctor, good gentleman, do'ee call in at Park cooming back, and tell Mrs. White, the housekeeper, how 'tis wi' I. She's been biggest o' friends to me and my Benjy ever since I wur left a widder."

"Benjy," said Ned, as he went out, "do you know what peppermints are?"

"Ees goodies," quoth he, licking his lips with unmistakable intelligence.

"Well then, you mind the fire, and take care of

mammy, and don't run out upon the moor till I come back, you know, and I'll bring you some peppermints; do you hear, Benjy?"

"'Ees, goodies," he repeated, and licked his lips again.

So Ned went hurrying down towards Rookenhamb, forgetful of his own troubles, having gained a precious respite in his conflict with the fiercer spirit that had urged him on before this unexpected visit to the fatherless and widow in their affliction.

He chanced upon the doctor a mile before reaching the village, close by one of the Park lodges. He promised to go up at once to the sick woman; but would drive Ned up the Park avenue, to convey her message to the friendly housekeeper. Mrs. White, a motherly kind of woman, was much concerned at hearing of Rizpah Cottle's trouble. She would go to her at once; but must put up a little parcel of comforts whilst the Shetland ponies were being harnessed. She would give Mr. Locksley a lift over the moor on his way back. My lord's little study was the only room where the things were uncovered, as no one was at Rookenhamb just now; perhaps Mr. Locksley would step in there and sit down.

He sat down at a writing-table in the centre of the room, and looked round. It was plainly

furnished, and but for the blue books and official papers, presented the appearance of a studious man's sitting-room in College. By the fire-side was an arm-chair, whose shape and cover seemed to announce that it had strayed from a lady's boudoir ; and on the mantel-piece, between two very common spill-holders, was an exquisite vase of old Dresden. Both were cherished souvenirs of Lord Royston's mother. That never came into Ned's mind ; which fastening at once upon their presence, and perceiving their incongruity with all else in the study, looked forward for an explanation, instead of backward ; setting down to anticipation what was indeed a retrospect. Hot and bitter came back the flush of jealousy.

"What? Is he so sure of her? Shall she sit there, and snip his red tape for him, as he docketts his papers and fingers his blue books?"

He went striding up and down the room, his fingers twitching nervously with the play of an impulse, which almost mastered him, spite of his shame, to seize the Dresden vase and dash it into splinters, as he had done by the big stone on the moor.

"He counts already on seeing her dainty fingers coax the flowers into perfect grouping of form and colour. I've half a mind to smash the—"

"Please Master Ned, the ponies is to, and I've put up Rizpah's parcel. We'd better be going before it's any later. But bless me, what have I been thinking about? I do believe the rheumatics affect my head at times. You've come over all the way from Cransdale, this forenoon, and I'll be bound to say you've never had a morsel of lunch. I beg a thousand pardons; you shall have a tray in five minutes."

"Not a bit—not a morsel!" cried Ned, with savage emphasis.

"Oh, deary, deary me! I beg your pardon humbly. It's more than my lord would easily forgive me, being so unhospitable; it's not Rookenhamb ways, by no means," quoth Mrs. White, much distressed. "We can't have nothing hot in so short a time, Master Ned—that is, Mr. Locksley; but if a cold fowl with a cut of ham and a grouse-pie, and—"

"Not a single morsel—I mean no thank you—I really beg your pardon. I am very sorry—that is, I didn't mean—in fact, I don't feel hungry. Thank you very kindly all the same, Mrs. White; but, as you said, it's late, and a long drive over the moor," stammered out Ned. In his wrath he would have neither bite nor sup under his rival's roof, nor out of his rival's larder; yet he was in terrible and

ridiculous confusion at having let that wrath burst out upon hospitable Mrs. White. He seized up his hat and hurried out, in spite of her entreaties. In the passage they met the still-room maid, whom she, with ready presence of mind, despatched for a bag of biscuits ; but before even that dry fare could be provided, Ned had hustled the discomfited house-keeper into the pony-chaise, and with an unjustifiable cut at either Shetlander, had sent them galloping down the avenue towards the lodge.

There was a trifle of asthma about the good stout lady sometimes no less than a touch of those "rheumatics" at which she had glanced in her apologies. So the Long Avenue was passed, and the stretch of high road beyond the lodge ; and it was the ponies' turn to be shortish of breath, tugging up the hill side, before she had recovered her's sufficiently to enter upon conversation. Ned had been silently grinding his teeth, partly to confine his fury—partly, perhaps, to curb involuntary remonstrances of certain inward feelings against his sentimental refusal to satisfy their imperious and legitimate cravings.

"I'm so sorry my lord wasn't down at Rookenhamb, Mr. Locksley—Master Ned I was a-goin' to say. Then this sad business, may be, wouldn't have happened."

"How could Lord Royston have kept poor Riz-pah—that's her name I think you said—from getting a sun-stroke?"

"La, Master Ned. I beg pardon, Mr. Locksley, I wasn't a thinking of that poor creature, but of your going without your lunch now."

"Not another word about it, pray, Mrs. White. It's my own doing. No one who knows your heartiness could doubt it."

"Ah, Master Ned—it *will* come more natural than Mr. Locksley—I mind the time when you'd have made something like a luncheon. Mussy on me! how fast time goes. It seems like yesterday, yet it's some years now, since I seen you three come tearing down the hill side and up the avenue a horseback; you, and the young Earl, and Lady Constance, with her beautiful hair all fleering in the wind a head of both of you. How she did gallop to be sure! It's often made my blood run cold to see such a lovely child as she was running wild with you boys! I don't know when you've all three been over at Rookenhamb. Last time she came here you wasn't with her, not the Earl nor you. She came with Lady Cransdale and my lord in the barouche."

Ned ground his teeth the harder; but Mrs. White, who rather liked to have the conversation to herself, went on—

"She's altered very much, is Lady Constance, more grandlike, and stately to look at; but just as beautiful as ever, I think; and quite as kind-spoken. She took one hand of mine in both of her's, she did, and says she—'You dear old Mrs. White, it's an age since I set eyes on you.' I'll tell you what it is, Master Ned, now," persisted the good housekeeper, edging nearer to the luckless driver and sinking her voice to a confidential whisper, "you should just a seen' em standing side by side, my lord and Lady Constance, and you'd a thought as I did—'Well, there wouldn't be such another couple to be found in England, if so be, as ever they were to *be* a couple,' as I'm sure I wish they might."

"Too steep for the ponies," was all Ned's answer, jumping down from his seat beside her as if she scorched him.

When the tug uphill was over, he jumped in again, and began at once, determined not to let Mrs. White select the topic of conversation—

"Who's this Rizpah Cottle, Mrs. White? What on earth brought her up there on the moor?"

"Well, she's a poor lone widow, Master Ned, and it's her Benjy brought her up upon the moor?"

"Lone widow, sure enough; but she must have an extra turn for loneliness, spite of having Benjy

to keep her company, if she lives up there of her own accord."

"Ah, Master Ned, you don't know what a mother's heart is! How should you?"

"Don't I, Mrs. White? You forget what a mother of my own I have."

"Not I, neither. I known her afore you were thought of, as they say. I lived housekeeper at her grandfather, the Archdeacon's, years afore he got me my present place in old Lord Rookham's time. She were a sweet young lady, were Miss Lucy, so gentle and loving-like; there was the makins of a mother in her long before she had ever a child."

"Well, but what has Rizpah's motherly heart to do with living up all alone upon the moor with Benjy? I should have thought it safer for the child to have been down with other little 'uns at Rookham. Is he mischievous? Would he bite 'em?"

"Lor, Master Ned, how can you? No, poor little fellow; he's mischievous by times, but not spiteful that ever I hear tell. I'd better begin at the beginning, perhaps, and then you'll understand all about it."

"All right, Mrs. White, fire away then."

"You know the quarries at Garlige, the other side of Rookham village?"

"To be sure I do."

"Ralph Cottle—that was Rizpah's husband—was one of the quarrymen. Fine men they are mostly ; but given to drink, which I never heard say as Ralph was, neither, Master Ned. But he was very careless and masterful about keeping in harm's way, as them quarrymen always have been, that I can mind."

"Careless about the powder-bags, eh ?" threw in Ned considerately, for the conflict between the short wind of the asthmatic patient and the long wind of the story-teller, seemed to demand the occasional intervention of the listener. "I suppose he came to grief in blasting, quarryman fashion, too?"

"Just so, Master Ned, dear, just so. He was a walking unconcerned-like, with both hands in his pockets, when he should have been running ; which, indeed, it was said at the coroner's inquest, he ought to have been out of harm's way two minutes afore the blast came at all—when off it goes, like any thing, and a sharp piece cut like a skull-cap right off his head, poor fellow, and scattered his brains, as it was awful to see, though they did tie it up with a handkerchief afore they carried the corpse right in to poor Rizpah, that was expecting him home to dinner, poor thing, a-sitting by the

fire, to watch a bit of fresh pork she had roasting, as she's told me scores of times since."

"What a ghastly sight for the poor woman! I wonder it did not turn her brain to look on it."

"No, she never gave so much as a screech they say; but sat stony-like, and said, quite quiet and composed: 'Please lay' un out on the bed, poor fellow!' 'But there, Mrs. White' (she've a told me scores o' times) 'I feeled jist so as if my heart had given two turns wrong, and then bid still, you know.' Her baby was born not six weeks after, and though her brain wasn't turned, *his* was; for that was her Benjy. I've heard tell that she wanted to call him 'Benoni, the son of sorrow,' when he was christened, like Rachel a-dying; but our Rector down at Rookenhamb persuaded her to alter it, like Jacob, you know, sir."

"Was the child an idiot from its birth then?"

"I thought so myself, so soon as ever I set my eyes on it; not as I said so to Rizpah, poor thing, for 'twas plain to see she didn't think so for a long time."

"Poor creature! I dare say she found it hard to face the fact."

"Hard! Bless you, it was heartless to see her watch for any sign of sense like in her baby. I have seen her sit with it upon her knees and nurse

it, and sing, and talk to it, and look, look, look, into its restless eyes as if to fix the sense into them."

"Well, but Mrs. White, all this don't tell me what brought her and her Benjy up here upon the moor."

"Don't it though? Wait a bit, sir, and you'll find it does. She gave her life up to Benjy from the first. How she ever managed it, I've never rightly understood. Many were kind to her; but Rizpah had a proud spirit of her own, and never would beg while she could work. Work! I believe ye. She's done wonders to find time for work and to wait upon her child as well. She never neglected him for one half hour, seemingly; and yet she'd earn enough to keep herself and him."

"But living up upon the moorland, so far off, must have increased her difficulties tenfold. They didn't live here in the father's time, did they?"

"No, Master Ned; no more they didn't in the first years of little Benjy's life. It was along of a foreign doctor, that came once to my lord's, that Rizpah left the village and took the cottage here."

"A foreign doctor?"

"Yes. He was a Swish, I think, leastways a German sort of gentleman with spectacles, as smelt of smoke. And he saw Benjy; and told his mother that pure air up on hilltops, was likeliest for such

as that poor child to thrive in. He said there was plenty such where he lived, and they put them up in hospitals a-top of mountains. Christians, I think, he called 'em; though it's poor sort of Christians such as Benjy's like to make—not but what some persons *do* call them *Innocents*."

"Oh crétins! Yes, I see the whole thing now. I've heard of those mountain hospitals. So Riz-pah came up into the wild, to give her idiot boy the best chance of thriving? Brave heart, indeed!"

"Only a mother's, Master Ned;" said Mrs. White.

"Only a mother's!" Ned kept repeating the words to himself aloud, long after he had parted at the cottage-door from Mrs. White.

CHAPTER IX.

THE dinner dressing-bell was ringing, as Ned reached the lodge, and he was glad enough to go straight to his own room without encountering either father or mother. Few lads spent less time at a looking-glass in general; but, on this occasion, few fair ladies would have spent more than he. In fact, the stone-splinter had left its mark upon his broad forehead pretty plainly; and he had much ado to master the unwonted task of coaxing one lock of his brown hair to hide it. When at last he came down stairs, he was glad to find a fourth person in the drawing-room, with Mr. and Mrs. Locksley. That would stave awkward questionings off a little.

"No fish, Ned?" said his father, "I suppose."

"Not a fin."

"Who left her without a kiss this morning?" said his mother, as he bent to her cheek over the back of her arm-chair.

The fourth person was a man of business come to confer with Locksley upon some matter concerning my lord's estate. He was a well-informed and chatty man, whose conversation made the dinner unconstrained and tolerable. Once only, Ned felt his mother's look seeking what lay beneath the lock upon his forehead. She lifted it with her soft fingers as she passed him on her way out of the room, but dropped it without a word. "Only a mother's heart!" thought Ned, "only a mother's heart!" whilst the man of business was endeavouring to enlighten his father on the nature and value of railway scrip, a new and not over important item yet in the catalogue of marketable "securities." Clouds had come up at sunset, in spite of the past brilliancy of the day; so it was darker than might have been expected for the time of year.

"Any more claret, Mr. Robins?"

"No, thank you."

"And you *must* leave to-morrow morning?"

"Early, to meet the mail."

"Then I'm afraid we must shut ourselves up in the study, spite of the pleasant coolness in the air

after all this heat. It's an intricate business, that Colnbrook mortgage, and will take us some time to look well through."

"Entirely at your service, my dear sir."

"Ned, tell your mother to send us a cup of tea downstairs later. I don't think she'll see us in the drawing-room again to-night."

He found her lying on a sofa, in an arched recess, by a window, the light from which went past, leaving her in half-gloom. He was glad of that shadowy darkness; he sat down in it, close beside her on the floor, and would have taken her hand in his. But she laid both hers gently upon his head, and drew it down to her own breast. Then she lifted the concealing lock again, and said, almost in a whisper,

"I fear the wound is deep, Ned."

"What! that scratch, mother?"

"No, Ned! not that wound; but the other!"

"What other?"

He disengaged himself from her hold on him, turned, faced her, and was sorry now for the deep twilight which lay upon her countenance, dimming the lights and lines whence he might have read an answer.

Both were silent. But, through the shadows, the soft light, streaming full of tenderness, grew

luminous between her own eyes and her boy's. At last he saw, and saw that she saw. So he let his head sink, till it rested on her breast again, and said,

"Yes, mother, very deep, indeed."

His ear lay so close that it heard the quick throb quickening, and the words once more came thrilling him, "Only a mother's heart!"

How could he think of wringing it by leaving her? He would carry out her hopes, as truly as his own regrets, for burial, to that far East, towards which his face was set? By what right would he do so?

"Did you guess it, then, dear mother?"

"No, Ned. Fool that I was; how can I forgive myself!"

He was startled by a bitterness so little like her usual gentle mood. He put his hand upon her heart as he withdrew his head again, and felt the bound.

"Are you angry, then, with me for this?"

"No, my poor boy, my darling; not with you. Angry with *you*, indeed!"

"With whom, then, dearest Not with *her*?"

Lucy was half indignant at his eagerness to absolve, nay, to battle for her, who had filched his heart from himself and from his mother. But,

half ashamed at her own indignation, she said nothing.

“Who told you, then?”

“Her mother.”

“Was *she* angry with me?”

“She said not; only sorry.”

“Well, that was kind of her.”

“Ah, but it hurt *me* more! I never knew till now the cruelty of pity.”

Then, again, both were for some time silent.

“How came the cut upon your forehead?”

“From a splinter of a stone I smashed.”

“Then *you* were angry; that’s an old angry trick of yours. Angry with her, or with her mother, Ned?”

“With neither.”

“With yourself?”

“I *should* have been.”

“But were not. Tell me, then, with whom.”

“I was high up on the moor, and could overlook the tree-tops at Rookenhamb!”

“Oh, fool, and blind!” she cried, starting up.
“Not you, Ned—no, my darling, not you; but your mother, here. I never thought of Royston for her, no more than of you, my poor boy. Are you sure of it?”

“Almost. And I think Royston is.”

Then he told her—for, somehow, he could keep nothing back just then—how near the Dresden vase on Lord Royston's mantelpiece had been to sharing the fate of the splintered stone. He told her also of Mrs. White's chattering surmises, and of the way in which her random words had stung him to the quick.

Lucy's purpose had not faltered during all the long hours of that day, which had seemed weeks to her, waiting for this heart to heart talk with her son. Had it done so, his last words would at once have steadied it.

"He must go," she thought, "since it is plain that Lady Constance will not. If Rookenhamb is to be her home for life, it is as if she were fixed her life long here at Cransdale. To be pricked to death with pin points is exquisite ignominy no less than exquisite pain. Severance may bring sadness; but continual contact, such as theirs would be, can only breed fretfulness or savagery. My Ned shall go, were pangs of parting to kill me."

Little wonder that the lad felt more and more as if the subtle, sympathetic stream between her eyes and his, were searching out the very deep of the spirit within him. Part from her! It seemed as if the power to will—could he still wish it—were being drawn from out of him, by that strange magnetism of a mother's victorious love.

"But what took you, my dear boy, to Rookenharn? I should have thought it the last place where you would have gone to-day."

Then came the story of the idiot child and his sick mother.

"Poor woman! only think how she must have increased the hardship of the struggle for a livelihood by living miles off from her work up there. What a magnificent self-sacrifice!"

Oh, what luxury to hear him say so! To hear him marvel and admire at what she had it in her own heart to outdo. It sent a thrill through her, almost too delicious to be lawful. Stay! was that so, or was it not? Could self-indulgence be blame-worthy, rising, unsought, out of self-sacrifice?

"Yes, Ned! But she did it to keep her boy."

"To keep her boy," thought Edward; "so that is full explanation is it, and dwindle down the marvel in a mother's eyes? To keep her boy! That then is full satisfaction for a self-devoted mother's heart—'Only a mother's heart!' Ah, yes, I see. 'Only a mother's heart!' very true!"

Again there was a long spell of silence. Edward looked out at the open window, where a thinning space upon the cloudy sky-field, showed that the moon's forceful gentleness was melting the heat mists away. But he still felt his mother's look

stream on him, and knew that her eyes did not go wandering forth into the summer night.

He was now sitting on the lower end of the sofa and she near the head of it. Presently she drew nearer him, and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, said :

“ When do you go, Ned ? ”

“ Go, dearest ; go where ? ”

“ To India.”

“ Oh, mother, mother ! ” He put his arms about her so manful tenderly. “ I was selfish, ungrateful, cowardly. I will stay here.”

This also was delicious with deliciousness, pure beyond suspicion. She paused to drink it in and savour it. They had not stolen *all* his love from her !

“ My Ned, I cried this morning in my first pain. My Ned, yes, *mine*, for he will stay with me.”.

And he was hers. Yet,—ah, she was spared knowledge of the cruel yet !—yet, as she put her mother lips upon the spot where Constance’s had been upon his forehead, there was a shiver in his heart, as if the newly-buried love had stirred within its living grave, because the seal on it was touched.

“ You stay here, Ned ? Have you counted the cost ? ”

His was a very truthful soul ; a few moments, therefore, passed before his answering :

"I summed it up in the rough ; but hardly looked at items."

"And you are ready to pay?"

"Cost, what cost will."

The moon's disk by this time was clear of mists. A silver beam came slanting into the arched recess. Her son could see by the moonlight, as her husband had seen by the glare of day, that a mystic smile was making some sweet glory upon her face ; but he was no better able than his father to spell its full meaning out.

She turned away from him on a sudden, passing her hands between the sofa and the angle of the wall. A clink, as of brass rings and buckles, struck his ear ; and a gleam, as of burnished metal, flashed on his eye when she turned again.

"See, Ned ! I cannot give you your proud lady-love, but I can give you this instead. Does not the 'Sword Song' call it a 'steel bride' ?"

"What is it, mother, dear ?"

But the words were idle ; for, as if a magnet drew his fingers, they had at once an iron grip upon the hilt.

"You know it well enough, Ned. Your grandfather's old sword."

One hand was on the hilt, the other on the scabbard. He drew it—scarce an inch or two, thrust

the steel down quick into the sheath again and held it back towards her.

“Do not tempt me, dearest. I said ‘cost what cost will.’”

“God bless you for your will to make the costly sacrifice, my son. May He accept it!—in such sort as we do—your father and I—taking the will for the deed; for we are well resolved to take no more from you. I will not call your wound a mere boy’s fancy, Ned. A sorrow piercing your heart wounds my own too deep for that. But young flesh and young spirit are akin, when both are pure and healthy as I joy to believe yours, my darling. Their wounds heal firm and clean when nothing frets and gangrenes. This home would be a sickly hospital for you. Here you would have a thousand petty throes to regain your heart’s mastery; and you might fritter away in them a thousand times the strength which would give it you, wrestling elsewhere.”

She had fixed her eyes again upon him, and the love-stream flowed from them; but not now as before. They were sitting upon the sofa, not side by side now, but almost face to face. Ned had both hands upon the hilt of the sword, which had its point upon the floor. His head was propped on them, and he was looking at his mother as if he

would try to read her inmost thought. But living books can scarce be read save when their life is passive, or when its energy is not directed full on the would-be reader. And there was a might kindled in those soft eyes of his mother's which forbade the attempt to sit and merely read their meaning. His heart and mind seemed fairly subdued to hers.

"Something strange has waked up in me, dear boy. A pride *for* you of which my old pride *in* you had not made me yet aware. You know that I am sorry—oh, how sorry, how sorry!—for you, Ned, and for me. Yet, I am glad. This quiet nest-life here, green summer-life, snug winter-life—it is no life for you, your pulse beats too quick for it."

She stretched out her hand, whose soft fingers felt along his wrist for the veined passage where she might time his young blood's bounding.

"How could I think—it must have been wishing, not thinking, all along—that it would flow so gently dull as ours. I don't say now that I would have chosen a soldier's calling for you. But I would have you live a strong life; and since you have chosen, be it so—a strong soldier's."

Then she drew near him, and passed her arm round his waist; and because she felt certain now that in herself and in her boy there was a strength that would not weaken nor grow soft, she drew his

head once more upon her shoulder, and they sat silent and still. When her lips once more touched that same spot on his forehead no pang quivered within. Presently they heard the father's footsteps on the stairs, and the parting "good-night" of his business guest. Then Locksley came in, and Lucy rose up with her boy and went across the room to meet him. She took one of his hands and laid it upon the hilt of the weapon, which Ned yet held in one of his, and said—

"Robert, you give your own son—do you not—your gallant father's sword? He wants to carry one, and I have told him that we wish it too."

"Take it, Ned, as your mother says," was all his answer. The film had come again across the summer moon, so the son saw not the salt beads which rolled over and out of his father's eyes.

CHAPTER X.

"WHAT's up at the Locksley's, I wonder," quoth his Lordship, sauntering into the room where his mother and Lady Constance were, his hairy doggie close upon his heels; "Ned and his father drove over before breakfast to meet the London mail; and there's something queer about Mrs. Locksley's eyes."

A quick looked passed between mother and daughter; but they were saved any need of speaking by the entrance of a servant with the post-bag.

"One for me," said Philip, opening it. "Scotch post-mark; that's from Macphail, I bet, to know whether Skye came safe. Beg, Skye, beg; here's news from your kennel! One for my lady. Royston's fist apparently." And he gave it to his mother.

"The next is a whopper!—official, as I'm alive! It must be my commission; and I'm a grenadier for good!—Hooray!"

Suddenly that "something queer" of his easy slang came into his own mother's eyes as well. No such need her's as Lucy's, to steel her heart against pangs of utter severance; still the boy was gone one step farther from her side. She drew him to her, almost unconsciously, and with nervous fingers would help him to break seals and tear envelopes. But Lady Constance left the room, and presently the house.

She had seen the light quenched in her mother's looks as it kindled up in Philip's, and she could not rest for thinking of the blight which must have fallen upon Lucy's joy.

She wondered whether in her heart her old friend had begun to hate her. Next to her own mother, there was no woman whom she loved so well. At her knee, as at a second mother's, she had grown to womanhood. Countless memories, countless endearments, a thousand trifles, which make a girl's life sweet, bound her to Mrs. Locksley. And she felt, with unerring instinct, that Ned's love for herself had cost that dear friend her son.

On her heart's knees she longed to crave for

pardon—but for what? For being lovely? For being loveable? At least for having seemed to be such in an almost brother's eyes? The very thought of having such self-consciousness made blushes burn under her satin skin.

Wherein had she wronged Edward? Not the strictest search of self could herein convict her of a single willing fault.

Wherein had she wronged Lucy? That were as hard to say. Wronged was not just the word. But if Lucy's son had missed his footing on some towering cliff, and fallen, because Constance, clad in white, had neared him, all unknowingly, and he had taken her for some sad ghost—what then? Would she feel shiven of her guiltless guilt until his mother's very lips had spoken absolution?—No!

Therefore she must speak to Mrs. Locksley face to face. And because her heart was brave, as well as tender, she must needs speak at once. And when they were come face to face, either did seem ghostly to the other. Ghostly, not ghost-like, for it was broad daylight; and each stood revealed to the other in real shape and true proportion; but the ghostly element, the spirit which was in either, seemed to have unusual mastery over the outward frame and expression of them both.

They spoke and spoke plain to one another—neither uttering a word.

Lucy was sitting where Lady Cransdale had found her sitting the day before. The same bit of muslin work in her hands ; but both hands idle in her lap. She sat upright, and looked straight out—not on the green lawn, not at the feathery cedars, not over the brown moor, not up to the summer sky ; but miles and miles off by the thousand, into the far East and into the coming years, looking at what should befall her boy.

Lady Constance came straight to the open window, and stood opposite her ; and yet, for a long time, did not intercept her straining sight ; and seemed at last to shape herself and grow distinct upon its field, gradually, as when a spy-glass is shortened till the focus is come true. And as Lucy felt fully conscious of her presence by degrees, so she felt conscious of a pleading power of rebuke in Constance's lovely violet eyes, as they looked on her. Constance knew nothing of that ; but Lucy felt it in her inmost soul.

How dared she call her, last night, "his proud lady-love." Such heart-entreaty, such strong humility, such noble pitifulness, withal such consciousness of right, as now confronted her, what could these have to do with vulgar pride! "Unjust!" said the spirit within.

Love-light is complex; and though the glories of the passionate ray were wanting, yet Lucy saw that beautiful countenance—as she had never seen before—in some rays of the light in all of which her son had seen its loveliness.

She shook her head, and said in a low voice, yet loud enough to fall on the girl's ear—"No wonder!"

As if the spell which had kept her across the threshold, were broken, Lady Constance came in, knelt down by Lucy's side, took her unresisting hands and kissed them, and murmured—

"Forgive me for breaking in upon your sorrow, Mrs. Locksley; but I could not keep away."

"Then, you know why he is gone?"

She hid her face in Lucy's lap and said—

"I fear, because of me."

"And tell me, Lady Constance, do you know where he is going?"

Something harsh vibrated in her voice, whereat Constance, though still kneeling, looked up, as if to meet a challenge. Firm, in perfect gentleness, she looked her friend again in the face, and answered deliberately, though without hesitation—

"I think so; but am not quite sure."

Great deeps had been broken up in that mother's troubled soul, and strange lightnings were still

playing over their turmoil. Constance caught one flash of them ; but did not shrink from nor resent its glare.

Yes ! It was hard hearing, that she who would have none of his love should yet have known his life-secrets before herself, who loved him more than life. But, after all, the storm was even now retreating ; and though the flash were seen, no roll of angry thunder came.

“ Dear Mrs. Locksley,” said Lady Constance, rising and taking seat beside her, “ I will hide nothing from you of what I know. It is only now, this moment, under your troubled glance, that I remember how words of mine may have influenced your son in any wish to leave you ; if, indeed, as I gathered from what he told my mother the other day, he thinks of leaving you for India.”

It was some sort of consolation to gather hence that the jealous surmise was not wholly true ; that her boy’s secret wish had not been long beforehand delivered into other keeping than her own.

“ He is gone to town with his father to seek an appointment in the Indian Army ; but he is gone, Lady Constance,” she spoke with tremulous eagerness, “ at my own earnest entreaty and request.”

“ Thank God for that at least,” said Constance.

“ Why so ?”

"Because—because—perhaps I am selfish; but I should have found this sorrow much more hard to bear, had dearest Ned's sad heart turned to rebellion against you—against a mother so loving, and I will answer for it too, so dearly loved."

"Why did you call that 'selfish, perhaps?'"

"Because in presence of your grief, and his, I had no sort of right to be thinking whether what sorrow I might have to bear were less or greater."

"That is very nobly said?"

"Is it? I did not know; but spoke the simple truth."

"Then you are sorry, indeed?"

She had no need to speak in answer to the question. Lucy saw that; but persisted:

"For whom are you sorry? For me?"

Constance raised her friend's hands to her lips, and kissed them, so tenderly.

A momentary gleam of a wild hope shot through Lucy.

"Look at me full once more, Lady Constance. Are you sorry—ever so little—sorry with ever so faint a shade of sorrow—for yourself?"

Her breath seemed cut off as she wrung the beautiful girl's hands in the agony of that inquiring, beseeching, almost despairing moment. It was like the failure of a dying person's grasp, to feel her

fingers fall away, as she turned back her head from the truth-telling eyes of Constance.

"Ah, well! But you did say you were sorry for him, too. Have you none of that for him to which pity is kin? Do you not love him a little?"

"No, dear Mrs. Locksley, not a little. Because I do love him, as I told him, so very much. He is my brother, and must ever be so."

"Then you do not"—she hesitated, and her eye dropped before her younger's, and she felt a flush of shame at asking an unworthy question; but, there, it spoke as it had spoken in her heart: and it was better to let it cross her lips and kill itself with its own sound, perhaps. "You do not despise him?"

"I should despise myself if I could do so. There must be something tenderer in ties of blood than of the earliest and closest intimacy. So, of my two brothers, there is a sense in which I love Philip best; but I never was blind to the nobler loveworthiness of Ned."

Sweet pain to hear her say so. Sweetness in the true verdict; pain, in the passionless calm of the true judge.

"What were those words of yours, then, which may have influenced his longing for this Indian soldiership?"

"Indeed, indeed, I never thought of influencing

him; but we have often talked of India, and of that great Eastern Empire, and I spoke as I think of it."

"And how may that be?"

"As a grand field for a great-hearted Englishman."

"So you have sent him to reap there with a sword!"

"I never meant it so: never dreamt of doing it. But if I have done it, I will not say that my sorrow for him—for *him*, mind you, dear Mrs. Locksley—is on that account."

"Why not?"

"Because great fields want reapers of great heart, and Ned is one."

"Thank you! How well you know him! Oh, could you but have loved him as he loves you. Well, well! Forgive me! That could not be. No! could not. I understand now, Lady Constance, dear: it could not."

She was conscious of the stir within of yet one other question, which she had no right to put. But the wrong of putting would be too wrongful. She would not let it look out at her eyes, much less take frame upon the threshold of her lips. She was a woman even before a mother, therefore she would not yield to the temptation of affronting the frank

and beautiful girl's womanliness. Her voice sunk at the "could not," without insinuating "why not?"

Constance rose to go. Lucy rose too, and by a mastering impulse held out her arms. And they were locked in close embrace, murmuring, "Forgive me," and, "I have nothing, no, nothing, to forgive."

Lucy's tears fell fast when she was once more alone: but calm was returning to her heart as the showery veil falling leaves the blue vault bright again.

"Hallo, Con!" cried the Earl, as his sister came back into the room where he and his mother were still in conference.

"Where on earth have you been all this time, and what the mischief makes you look so grave? Queer eyes seem all the go this morning."

There was no use in concealing what must so soon be known, so she answered:

"I have been to Mrs. Locksley's."

"Oh, you have! Well, what's up with Ned?"

"He's gone to London with Mr. Locksley to make interest at once for a commission in the Indian Army."

"What! Ned gone for a sodger, and a sepoy, too! Are you gone cracked and crazy, Con, or is he?"

"Not I, for certain; and I should think not he."

"This is a rum start! No wonder Mrs. Locksley's eyes were queer!"

Lady Cransdale shook her head—a shake which he rightly interpreted as against his own inveterate slang.

"No, don't, mammy dear, don't, and I won't. I'll use dictionary words all right. I can come out strong in that line at a pinch. But you must allow that there is something catastrophic in this unexpected development of Mr. Edward Locksley's predilections for a strategical career! Why, let me see, when was it? Only the day before yesterday, as we rode over about Tommy Wilmot in quod—I beg pardon—to the locality of Mr. Thomas Wilmot's temporary detention by the constabulary authorities of the county—"

"Don't be silly, Phil."

"Well, there's no pleasing you both. Lady Cransdale won't have slang, and Lady Constance won't stand the dictionary. But anyhow, as we rode out together two days ago, this would-be "griffin"—technical Indian term, my lady, not Eton slang—was discussing his prospects as a Freshman at Christchurch next October Term. So I've some right to call it a 'rum'—a remarkable catastrophic incident, I mean."

"There's something sudden about his determination," said Constance, since something further must be said, though she scarcely knew what: "but he must have turned his thoughts to India long ago, for we have often talked of it together."

Her brother looked at her sharply, with an expression of extreme surprise.

"What, Con! Is your finger in this pie? Have you been recruiting for the Honourable E.I.C? What next, I wonder?"

He jumped up, and was going out, when his eye caught a letter on the floor under the table.

"Let's see, what letter's this? Why, it's Royston's. Is that the way you pitch about your correspondence, my lady?"

Lady Cransdale had dropped it unperceived, in her agitation at the receipt of Philip's official communication. He picked it up, and as he gave it to her, said:

"What says the Under-Sec., my lady?"

"Dear me!" cried his mother when the note was opened, "it's just as well the letter caught your eye, Phil. Ring the bell, will you, that I may tell some one to have the rooms in the east wing ready."

"What, is he going to 'cut' the office for a day or two? I mean, is the noble lord about to tear himself from his public avocations in favour of a temporary rustication here?"

"Yes. His chief is come to town, he writes, and has given him three days' run. He'll be with us at dinner this evening."

Trouble upon trouble. Constance felt what brought him, uninvited, to spend his three days' holiday at Cransdale rather than at Rookenhamb. It disturbed her deeply that he should have come just then. What would not Lucy's sore heart surmise, with its motherly pain to sharpen its womanly keenness? And poor dear Ned—Ned so truly dear—would he not think it cruel when he should hear that Royston was come, on the very day when he himself was driven from his childhood's home? Then, why did Philip eye her as he was doing—as he had done from the moment she had owned to some knowledge of Ned's Indian inclinations—as he had seemed to do with quickened inquisitiveness from the moment he had picked up Lord Royston's letter.

Did he suspect that she had wronged Ned; or did he fancy she would trifle with their kinsman; or, by what right did he imagine, if indeed he did, that there was any relation between her and him which could make trifling possible; or—but who can tell the million moods into which a maiden's heart will ripple under the breath of such thoughts and feelings as were moving Constance?

Firm and self-possessed as she was most times, she found it hard to keep an outward calm in this inward agitation. Do what she would the rising sob could not be kept from bringing teardrops up to hang on the long lashes of her eyes. As she left the room, still under inquisition of her brother's look, her mother followed and took her hand outside the door and pressed it, turning down the passage another way without a single word. What strengthening and consolation in that one gentle grasp of a mother's hand; what assurance of full understanding and pledge of hearty sympathy!

Small helps are great to strong spirits. Her nerves were strung again before Lord Royston came. Philip was at first full of his own affairs; so there was plenty of embryo guardsman's talk to keep conversation going. Then, in spite of the "not-a-soul-in-town" state of the metropolis, there were several somebodies about whose weal or woe, changes and chances, questions must be asked and answered, or information volunteered. Those were days before wires, and grand trunks were the only lines on which rails ran. Cransdale was remote from any such: the budget of London news was therefore fresher, and its unpacking less to be dispensed with than now-a-days.

"By-the-bye, Lady Cransdale, there's been one official change in which you may take some little interest. Sir James Macfarlane has got a 'liver,' so Barrington goes out to India in his stead. You know Barrington, don't you?"

"What! old Lord Bamford's son? Of course I do. Why, Royston, he's a connection of yours, on your mother's side. Old Lady Bamford was a Fitzhugh."

"Was she? Well, I had forgotten; but your word is as good as 'Burke's Peerage' for it. So Buffer Barrington's my cousin, is he? It's a pity I don't want anything Indian, that I know of, or I would claim cousinship by the next post, and tender your ladyship in proof of pedigree."

Constance's heart leaped up at the words "Anything Indian!" Could Barrington do "something Indian" for Ned Locksley? she wondered. And if he could, how bring herself to ask for Royston's interest with him? To ask a favour is, sometimes, to grant one, so great and so significant, that the giver, who has no misgiving as to the effect of the petition, has many touching the dangerous generosity of making it.

"But surely Barrington's young for such an appointment, Royston? And I don't know that he has ever distinguished himself so very much."

The Under-Secretary laughed outright.

"It's rude of me, Lady Cransdale, but I can't help it, I declare."

"You silly fellow, what are you laughing at?"

"The notion of *young* Buffer Barrington! He's about the oldest fellow going, is the Buffer, I should have said."

"Just hear him!" retorted her ladyship.

"There are no young people now-a-days. I suppose, in five years' time, you'll be sending Phil out to command in chief."

"A very sensible notion, mammy," cried that recruit of to-day. "I shall have mastered the goose-step in its remotest intricacies long before then, and be quite fit for high command. Now, mind you book that hint, Royston. I shouldn't so much mind a turn of Calcutta, if I went 'in chief,' but I go for nothing under."

"Do provincial governors have aides-de-camp?" ventured Lady Constance, who felt as if, after all, it would be treason to let slip such an opportunity.

"By George! well thought of, Con!" bounced Philip, with a sudden energy that showed her there was no use in cautious approaches any longer.

"A shoal of them if they like, I fancy. Lady Cransdale knows best. Your ladyship must remember how it was. But why do you want to

know? Guardsmen are, I take it, eligible; but Phil says he won't go under command-in-chief. Aides-de-camp are a trifle below that mark."

"St. John's Wood is jungle enough for me," said Phil. "I'm not the aspiring aide-de-camp."

"Who then?"

"I'm not sure that there is any in the case. But we were thinking of Ned Locksley."

"But Christchurch men can't be aides-de-camp, any more than ensigns can command-in-chief, eh?"

"Ensigns, indeed! Ensign and lieutenant, Mr. Under-Secretary. None of your civilian sauce, if *you* please."

"Excuse 'a pékin's' inadvertency," quoth the other, with mock solemnity. "But what on earth do you mean by mixing up Ned Locksley with Indian aides-de-camp?"

"Fact is, some freak has taken him; he's gone for a sodger; struck his friends all of a heap, in consequence."

"Phil! Phil!" said his mother.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I wished to convey to your lordship intimation of the fact that Mr. Edward Locksley's embracing a military career has been somewhat precipitate, and productive of some perturbation in the circle of his immediate con-

nections. That's right now, mammy dear, isn't it?"

"The long and the short of it is," said Lady Cransdale, "that Ned has determined to enter the Indian service; indeed, he is gone to London to settle about his commission; and we, of course, are on the alert for anything which can forward his interests in India."

Constance understood with what skilful and kind interest her mother had thrown out that "we, of course." She sent her across the table a glance of gratitude in return. Her mother saw it and readily understood its meaning. She would clear Constance at once of a petitioner's responsibility.

"Now really, Royston," she therefore went on to say, "I should take it as a personal kindness to myself if you could make play with 'Buffer Barrington,' as you call him, whether 'young' or 'old.' That is, if Ned goes to his Presidency. We shall soon know that."

"I'll move heaven and earth, Lady Cransdale—that is, such portions of them as comprehend the Buffer's universe—to do your bidding. Indeed, I should be very glad to do what I could for young Locksley's own sake. I don't know a more promising boy anywhere, though, somehow, he never seemed to take to me much."

"Boy!" mocked Philip. "Here's Royston coming the Pater conscriptus with a vengeance!"

"Oh, ah! Young man, I mean, of course, Phil, begging ten thousand pardons. I forgot Ned was your senior."

"Boy!" thought Constance, in her inmost heart. "Ah, poor dear Ned! If he could have heard *him* say it!"

She thought, moreover, deeper still within, that she could furnish Royston with a clue to that "somehow" which seemed inexplicable.

After dinner—the evening was exquisite—they went walking on the lawns and terraces. Constance kept close to her mother's side, and seemed to cling with nervous apprehension to her arm. She was usually so frank and fearless in every step and gesture, that her evident shrinking from him could not escape Lord Royston. The wit and wisdom of that rising young statesman suffered in consequence intense depression.

"Tell you what," said Phil at last; "you're about as jolly as a walking funeral, the lot of you. Skye, man, come here; we'll have a weed together, and let those solemn parties stalk about without the pleasure of our company." So he sat down on the grass, lit his cigar, and proceeded to worry the poor doggie with puffing smoke into his nostrils, till he snapped at him in desperation.

Lady Cransdale, after this, managed to get Lord Royston to the side of her, where Phil had been—a manœuvre which by no means augmented the cheerfulness of that official nobleman, but for which Constance hugged the arm on which she was hanging. And so they went, in spasmodic conversation, up and down and round and round, till they found themselves upon the rim of the marble basin of Constance's corner. Some of her rose leaves still swam on the water; some were sodden, and had sunk under it. A caddis grub, or some such creature, had rolled one up and plastered it slimly with bits of stick and small pebbles. Constance shuddered to see the crooked leglets of the wee crawling thing, moving it about the smooth bottom of the big marble cup.

"Are those your rose leaves, Con?" said her mother, she hardly knew why.

"I suppose they are. Let us go back, mammy dear."

As they turned to go, she saw that Royston did not at once turn with them; but though his knees were not yet bent to reach the rim, she felt that he would do as Ned had done, and skim some of her pulled rose leaves off the pond.

Quick as thought, and with as quick a pang of pain and girlish shame, she left her mother's arm

and turned towards him, and laid her hand upon his shoulder.

"Please not, Lord Royston!"

He looked more hurt even than startled.

"Why not, dear Lady Con—No! Dearest Constance, why not?"

She only shook her head; hurt, likewise, at having let herself be startled into doing as she had done.

"No answer, but your sweet will? Well, that is law for me."

There was such grace of manliness in his submission, that Constance could not leave it quite unrewarded, so she said—

"You shall have an answer, but not now."

Then she went forward quickly, and linked her arm close into her mother's, as before. Royston was wise enough to take his place also where he had been, upon the other side of Lady Cransdale, and they went slowly towards the house, none making many words.

But Philip was ready to rattle away again when they came in, having to demonstrate, among other things, the urgent needfulness of a return to town with Royston, when his three days' leave should end. The new soldier togs and trappings must be bought and tried.

Lady Cransdale did not wish to part from him unnecessarily soon: she and Constance would go too. So Cransdale House stood empty by the time that Mr. Locksley returned with Ned, an officer in the Company's army.

CHAPTER XI.

"WELL, what sort are the 'griffs?'" asked Captain Rufford of Lieutenant Jones. "How many of 'em are there this time?"

"Three, seemingly," he continued, unhooking his sword-belt; "one's a milksop to look at; I didn't notice the others. Here! messman! kidneys with the coffee; and jump about a bit!"

"A little badger-bait's about the thing, then, eh? By way of introduction to barrack life!"

"Bait, by all means; but without a badger; unless the others are more 'varmint' than the one I noticed. He wouldn't snap if he were drawn out of a barrel by the bunghole."

"Ugh! the sneaking animal! But there's no knowing after all, my boy. Some sneaks will snap under judicious provocation."

"Ah, well, we'll see. Here! messman, bitter beer? But how about the Major, Ruff, my boy?"

"Major's a muff. I'd give a trifle to draw that old humbug's den itself. He's grey enough to do the badger to the life, he is!"

"Grey enough? And grim enough, I believe ye. If he bit, he'd make the teeth meet, or I am a Dutchman."

"Wouldn't he?" re-echoed the Captain, with a scowl, which showed pretty plainly that he looked upon his senior officer with some worse feeling than a mere "fast" man feels against a mere "slow coach."

"Did you hear the old rascal's remark about that business with the cards at the Queen's depot last Friday night?"

"Not I," said Jones, a cruder scamp than his companion, and more compunctionous withal. "To tell you the truth, Ruff," and his voice lowered to the confidential pitch; "I've my doubts myself whether young Archer should have been allowed to play. He'd had an overdose of wine, you know."

"I can't say that, as a principle, it's a good plan, in the long run, to let 'green' parties drink so deep before they play; specially when they're green enough to make play pleasant without it, Jones, my

boy. But then, one mustn't look a gift-horse in the mouth ; and that amiable ensign's cheque for 'fifty' came at such a nick of time, that I couldn't afford to take the scrupulous view, do you see?"

"What nick of time? Any thing more amiss, than usual!"

"Don't you remember the thirty guineas lost upon the Battery-nag that won the hurdle-race. That Artillery Jenkins had been dunning me most inconveniently."

"Oh, ah, well, I'm glad you've paid him something ; stave him off me, perhaps, for I'm ten pound wrong with him on the transaction, I am."

"Humph! What's the milksop's name you mentioned?"

"Garrett, I think."

"A very nice name at the bottom of a cheque, no doubt. That sort of young man comes from home with credit at a bank most times. Quite as good a name as Archer, eh? Do quite as well for Artillery Jenkins?"

And Captain Rufford looked hard at Lieutenant Jones, half sounding, half suggesting.

"Perhaps he don't play."

"Perhaps not."

"But one might teach him. No! confound it, Ruff; that business of Archer's not blown over either!"

"Can't see that Archer's business is any of yours ; excuse me, Jones ; but I'm not prepared to say it's your downright duty to teach Mr. Garrett the use of his cards. He won't want for tutors, I dare say, should he wish for them."

"Certainly not ; no, certainly not."

And the lieutenant kept moving his coffee-cup round and round, half way between the table and himself, peering at the grouts in it, as if consulting some cabalistic oracle. After a considerable pause he began with diffidence again :

"Perhaps, if that's your game with him, we had better not have any badger-baiting ?"

"Whose game with whom ? You're coming out in the sphinx line, Jones."

"None o' that, Ruff ; you know what I mean."

"Do I ? Hum ! Well, speaking abstractedly, mind you, and without personal or particular reference ; but as a mere general speculative theory, I am inclined to think that badger-baiting, upon first acquaintance, is a doubtful means for captivating the shy confidence of a junior ; but one can't be cock-sure of anything. Some colts want rough handling at once when taken up from grass, some coaxing."

"Ah, very true," said Jones ; "yours is what I call practical philosophy."

"Yes, very practical ;" wherewith the captain took to reading *Bell's Life* with determination. Jones knew there wasn't a word more to be got out of him just then.

Presently came in Major Anderson, commanding the Honourable Company's dépôt at Chatterham. The dust had powdered his undress frock almost as grey as Indian service had grizzled his sandy locks. His adjutant was on the sick-list, and he had taken that duty on him this dry morning as well as his own command. The very slightest and stiffest courtesies, consistent with military etiquette, passed between him and his juniors ; and when he sat down at the long table, to his moderate refection of tea and toast, he availed himself to the utmost of the privilege its length afforded, of keeping at a considerable distance from them.

By-and-bye the mess-room door again was opened, with sound of rattle and clank outside, and loud calls upon the messman's immediate attention. Then came in, pell-mell, a whole squad of hungry youngsters, for the more part noisy, laughing, and talkative, the one graver face and steadier step among them being Ned Locksley's.

"Sharp-set with drill, young gentlemen ?"

It was a grating voice, with a rasp of drill-sergeant's hoarseness in it, but by no means un-

kindly ; nor was it an unkindly twinkle which came from the small grey eyes, whose corners were fine-drawn with crowsfeet.

"It's yourself I'd ate, Major," answered an unmistakeable brogue, "if it wasn't for the Mutinee Act and Coorts-martial."

"Poor pickings you'd have of it," quoth the threatened one, "to say nothing of bones to choke such a cannibal, should you fall foul of my carcase, Mr. O'Brien."

"Well, Major, it's osseous iligance your figure displays, for certain, rather than flesh devlopment."

"Ah, well! Six months' cantonments at Churcknagore will strip some vascular superfluities even from your sturdy frame, youngster, to say nothing of six-and-twenty years' campaigning."

"True for you, Major, dear ; and I told mee friends to take a good look at me at parting ; shure the better they'd know me now, the worse they'd recognise me whin home on lave again."

A laughing chorus of subalterns, easily pleased with a joke, was followed by a storm of shouts for the messman. He came in at last with a waiter in attendance, and three or four soldier-servants. A crash of knives and forks followed, with occasional pop of ale-cork or fizz from soda-water. Lieutenant Jones came down from the top of the table, and

made his way out, nodding to one or two of the youngsters as he went. Captain Rufford sat where he was, not so wholly absorbed in his sporting oracle as not to keep his ears well open or not to send a searching glance round the corner of its broad-sheet now and then.

"The military art stands on a praycarious footin'," began O'Brien, after the disappearance of a beef-steak of abnormal size.

"How so?" said the Major.

"Shure the goose-step as raycintly practised by the present company"—

"Shop!" cried another, "let's adone with drill for to-day, Pat."

"With all mee heart—for to-morrow too, and the day after, into the bargain, saving the Major's presence."

"Drill's better than dawdling," caught up another voice, "what's to be done till dinner-time?"

"There's cricketing somewhere down the Long Meadows," another answered.

"Cricket be blowed—it's too hot for out-of-door amusements, I say."

"Bedad thin," broke in O'Brien, "if it's too hot for you here, Mansfield, it's little enjoyment you'll have of the Major's cantonments at Chokery-chore, or whatever the name is."

"Claret cup and cards, with a nigger to keep a wet flap flapping, might help," suggested Mansfield.

Captain Rufford looked sharp and hard round the corner of his paper at the utterer of such congenial sentiments. Major Anderson eyed the speaker also, with a very different expression, from his crows-footed eyes. Mansfield was not a bad-looking boy, but of unwholesome complexion. There was an aping of premature manliness and an affectation of off-hand manner about him, which seemed to be a protest against his own evidently boyish appearance and age. Men of the Rufford stamp read "possible dupe and probable confederate" on such countenances as plain as on a placard.

"Humph, young gentleman!" said the Major; "if that's your notion of what an Indian officer's life should be in cantonments"—

"Ah, Major dear," rattled in the Irishman, "if it's Tilmachus ye're coming over us now; shure drill itself is an aisier diversion for youngsters."

"Telemachus, sir?" asked the Major, rather sternly.

"Ten thousand pardons, Major," he answered, quite unabashed, "it's Mintor I mane, to be shure now."

Roars of laughter, in which the senior had the good sense himself to join, greeted the blunder, and under cover of it the party broke up. The

Major and Locksley went out side by side, some of the others following. Three or four stayed on in the mess-room; among them young Mansfield and another subaltern, with whom Rufford was acquainted. The Captain put down his newspaper, and as he sauntered by, said to his acquaintance, "Introduce me to Mr. Mansfield, will you?"

Meanwhile the Major, whose gray peering eyes had scanned Ned's firm and handsome features closely as they crossed the barrack-yard together, made up his mind that their possessor was a lad worth looking after.

"Pray, Mr. Locksley, how do you think to kill time this afternoon? I didn't hear you say, when the other youngsters were in discussion."

"No use to murder such a determined suicide," said he.

"Well put, indeed. It's a foolish phrase for a more foolish thing. I'm glad you're of that mind, Mr. Locksley."

"My words are wiser than my wishes, I fear, Major, this morning; for to tell you the truth, the latter are in the Long Meadows already."

"Oh! you're a cricketer?"

"I have been," answered Ned, with just the least unconscious touch of a very young man's assumption of old experiences.

"Belong to any club?"

"The Eton Eleven."

This, with a not unpleasant spice of the school pride, which an old soldier's "esprit de corps" could well appreciate. The Major made half a salute, with a genial gravity very pleasant to the younger man.

"Indeed! I beg a thousand pardons. They must be praying for you down there then, if they suspect so great an acquisition to the garrison side. But what keeps you from them?"

"Well, I had meant to 'sap' a bit this afternoon, till those fellows talked about the match, sir."

"Sap a bit? I didn't know there was siege operations to-day. Besides which, you're not for the Engineers, you know, so"—

Ned laughed outright.

"It's a bit of old Eton slang I should apologise for, Major; and being translated means to stick to one's books."

"So you read, do you?"

"A little."

"Of what, may I make bold to ask?"

"Well, of siege operations, I suppose;" and he laughed quietly once more. "I've bought a book on fortification, and begun it; and I have got as far as cutting the leaves of a Hindustani grammar."

"So!" said the Major, whose self-esteem as a physiognomist rose many degrees forthwith. "I'm not much of an engineer myself; but a tolerable 'Moonshee.' If you want help with your Hindustani, I would do my best to give it you at any time."

"Really, Major, you could hardly do me a greater favour."

"I'll tell you what it is, sir, you come and take a quiet chop to-night, at seven, with Mrs. Anderson and me, unless you'd rather not miss dinner at the mess; and we'll settle about the grammar lessons out of hand."

Ned thanked him heartily, saluted, and on the strength of such educational assistance in prospect, thought himself entitled to exchange his regimentals for a suit of "flannels," and to take his pleasure for that summer day where wickets stood or fell.

His stood longer than most men's and when a fatal "twister" took the legstump at last, the "garrison" side, as well they might, cheered loudly the new champion, at whose score the "citizens'" faces had been growing blander and blander still.

Mrs. Anderson was rather an insipid lady, not having perhaps always been destitute of vital savour; but having parted with much of it under fierce Indian suns. She was a well-bred woman,

however, and received her husband's young guest as such an one should. Tasteless in the passive sense, she was not wholly without power of taste in the active. So Ned discovered when she roused herself to animation in praise of a certain Mrs. Grant, whose absence she regretted.

"How very provoking, Major, really. Didn't you say the Captain said his wife had promised him to be back by the early mail to-day?"

"Yes, I did, dear ; for so he did," answered the Major, in words of one syllable, like a child's primer.

"Oh, Mr. Locksley, I can't tell you how disappointed I am. I feel confident you would appreciate Mrs. Grant. You've been brought up among great folk yourself, I hear, and so was she, poor thing, and is well worthy of any place among them now, for all you find her a poor paymaster's wife. I think her very beautiful still, though she's no longer as young as she was ; and so does the Major, I believe, after all, though I reproach him with his indifference to her good looks. I don't see that a wife should be jealous if her husband admires one of her friends—do you, Mr. Locksley?"

"What a silly woman!" thought Ned ; but he, luckily, did not think aloud, and only bowed acquiescence.

"No, certainly not ; indeed, if he fails to do so, in a reasonable degree, he slighted the sex, and vexes me ; Major, I've often told you so."

"But Mrs. Grant's good looks, Mr. Locksley, faded or not, are nothing to her mind and manners, are they, Major ?"

"Old Grant coming up, ma'am," said the Major.
"Hear his boot-heels on the stairs, better hush up !"

"Oh, Captain ; you haven't brought her ! how could you disappoint me so ? She's been gone three weeks, the day before yesterday ; and said when she went, she wouldn't stay more than a fortnight."

"It's very kind of you, to miss her so," said Captain Grant, with a look of gratitude and satisfaction, which made Ned repent of his hasty judgment upon Mrs. Anderson. There must have been something better, on her part, than affected admiration of his wife, to make the captain speak and look thanks as he did.

"Well, and what has kept her ?"

"Amy had a headache ; and, though her mother thought it of no great consequence, and would have come away, her aunt wouldn't hear of it ; so the 'route' was counter-ordered."

"But we shall have them to-morrow ?"

"I suppose so ; but I don't know by which coach, late or early."

"I won't ask her to come up here to-morrow, then, if she comes by the late one; but will drop in upon her myself after tea. You must promise, however, to dine here the day after. I want to introduce Mr. Locksley to her. I dare say they have friends in common. Do you know Mr. Locksley? Allow me; Captain Grant, Mr. Locksley."

Then she turned to Ned, and said, "I hope you will dine with us after to-morrow?"

He was half inclined to excuse himself, being bored beforehand with Mrs. Grant; but the Major's Hindustani was too precious to be jeopardised for a caprice. So he accepted. Captain Grant was likewise cordial enough upon a first acquaintance, when he had heard from his old friend, the Major, of Ned's studious turn.

"I shall be glad to see you at my quarters, Mr. Locksley," said he, as they sat over their wine. "I only regret, as Anderson does, that it's so hard, here especially, for oldsters to get on with youngsters!"

"Why specially here?" asked Ned.

"Because we are like a sieve here, with holes so large that every thing goes through. We are a mere passenger dépôt, so to say."

"But don't you think the youngsters get younger now-a-days, Grant?" quoth the Major. "More boyish, and more thorough rattlepates altogether?"

"I am not so surē of that, Major ; but I'm thinking it's more certain that the oldsters get older. I can mind you with chesnut curls, Major, not to say red outright ; and we are grey enough now, the pair of us."

"True man, very true; yes, very true indeed," said the Major, with a sigh, and a sip at the port. "There's one thing I will say for the credit of the modern griff ; he don't drink as his forbears did."

"That's fifty per cent. increase upon his chances of coming out right at last," said the other.

"So it is ; but there's that gambling is the curse of the garrison just now. I hope that's not one of your vices, Locksley ?"

"'Tis a thing I hate and detest," said Ned.

"Ah, well ; I needn't preach to you to be upon your guard on that score," said the Major, who looked into Ned's countenance, and read again there that neither lie nor craft were kin to the nature of its owner. He turned towards the Captain.

"Did you hear of that affair of Archer's, Grant ?"

He nodded a grim assent.

"I hate a bark without a bite ; but if I could only fix the thing upon that 'leg' of a Rufford, I'd bring him to a court-martial as sure as—"

"Coffee, sir, Mrs. Anderson bid me say was in the drawing-room, to-night."

When Edward, two days after, met the Grants at the Major's, his estimation of Mrs. Anderson rose considerably. Admiration, so well placed, could not well be affected. Mrs. Grant was charming. Her "mind and manners" specially, little as Ned liked the term. As for her beauty, youngsters' eyes are less indulgent than oldsters' to that fading of charms which even Mrs. Anderson admitted. Ned's also were specially fastidious, having an image of rare perfection ever in them yet.

But there was no denying the grace of feature and expression, which gave a charm that would not fade to the face of the paymaster's wife.

There are some faces, winsome indeed of love; but which seem busier in giving than in winning it—faces on which the sorrow-lines show more of the sweetness wrought by sorrow than of the bitterness of its working-hours—faces on which the joy gleams are never insolent with selfish exultation, but ever radiant with a generous, unselfish glory. A brother that had lost a loving sister, might find on such a face a life-like reminiscence of true sisterly sweetness. An orphan that had never known a mother, might almost spell out on it what mother's love may be. A lover, whose love should be thrown back on itself in deepest disappointment, might catch such consolation on it, as grows of learning how love looks,

purified from passion. It was quite true that, as Mrs. Anderson had phrased it, "she had been brought up among great folk;" not among them only, but of them. Her manners had all that admirable self-possession, which scarcely true self-forgetfulness can give without the added advantage of the best social discipline; yet she was so perfectly, and kindly, and naturally, at home, just where she was, that there was no sense of incongruity aroused between herself and what surrounded her; none of that uncomfortable consciousness that one of the company has come down from a pedestal, expressly to be put upon a footing with the rest. There was music in her voice when she spoke; melody, though little power, when she sang; what is rarer, melodious music in her laughter at the loudest.

Her mental cultivation was evident even in the interchange of chance conversation with one of so poorly furnished mind as Mrs. Anderson. She knew some persons whom Edward knew, more yet about whom he knew; so they were soon on almost intimate terms, though he had not yet accepted the Captain's invitation to visit them at their quarters. Perhaps he waited till it should come from her: for she was the last lady in the world with whom, for all her sweetness, any one would venture to take a social liberty.

But Ned was often at the Major's, who stood as good as his word in the matter of Hindustani, and who for all his long familiarity with the spoken language, found it no child's play to satisfy the grammatical and scholarly queries of one who had stood in the sixth form at Eton.

One afternoon, as he came out from the Major's den, with grammar and lexicon under his arm, as he might have come erewhile out of the crusty presence of old Keate himself, he heard a childish voice exclaim, in tones, which, but for transposition into treble, might have been Mrs. Grant's—

“What a big school-boy! With a soldier's coat on!”

“Oh, for shame, Amy!” answered Mrs. Anderson.

“Why for shame, Aunt Susie? I'm not ashamed; and I don't think he is. He looks like a good boy, too.”

“And so he is, Amy!” laughed the Major's wife.
“Go and shake hands with him.”

She hung down her head, and shook a forest of golden curls over her face, out of which her large eyes scanned him, then she shook back the silken curtain, and with entire confidence went up to him, and put her tiny fingers into his outstretched hand.

“My name is Amy—pray, what's yours?”

“His name is Mr. Locksley,” said Mrs. Anderson, before he could answer for himself.

"That's not a name at all," answered Miss Amy, pouting : " Nobody calls me Miss Grant; and I call you Aunt Susie, though you know you're not my aunt a bit; and other people call you Mrs. Anderson."

"My name is Edward—will that do better?" he said, not a little amused.

"Is that what your brothers and sisters call you?"

"I have none," he said.

"Oh, dear, that's just like me! Then you're an only child?"

"Just so."

"Then what does your mother call you?—you have a mother, I hope." She said these last words in a voice as silvery as her own mother's; and over her mobile face stole a sweet anxiety, as if, child as she was, she dreaded having set inadvertently some sad chord in vibration in another's heart.

"Yes, thank God, I have, Amy; and a very, very dear one."

"And she calls you?"

"Ned."

"Very well, so shall I."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Anderson, looking up suddenly just then at the clock, "it's nearly half-past four. What shall I do to get you home, Amy? I promised your mother you should be home by this

time. I can't take you myself, for I have to go elsewhere with the Major, and my tiresome maid is not come in."

"Perhaps," said Ned, good-humouredly, "you would trust her with me, Mrs. Anderson."

"Well, if you would be so kind, I should be very much obliged to you."

So Amy's hat was tied on, and her gloves found, after considerable search, in possession of a tabby kitten, under a sofa ; and after kissing Aunt Susie, who hugged her with the longing of a childless woman, unsoured by her childlessness, she set off in high spirits with her new friend. She insisted, however, upon his leaving the books behind; it looked so much more like a school-boy than a soldier to have them under his arm, she said.

"I like all soldiers, even drummer boys, for I've always lived where there were soldiers. But I don't like school-boys. There were three where we've been staying, mamma and me ; and they were very rude to me; and tied knots in my hair; and one of them broke the nose of one of my dolls besides."

"That was a pity, certainly; but most dolls' noses get flattened some time or another, I believe."

"Yes, I believe they do. But then you know my dolls are not like most dolls—not a bit."

"Indeed! What are they like then?"

"Oh, you shall see, since you are coming home with me. I like showing my dolls—to sensible people, that is—you know."

"And do you think I'm one?" he said, much amused with the child's grave way of saying it.

"I'm sure of it."

"Pray why? Because of the big dictionary?"

"Well, just a little bit for that, perhaps—not much though."

"For what else then, Amy? I should like to know."

"Should you? I'm not sure I shall say."

"Don't, if you don't like to."

They walked on for a minute, without a word from either. Then Amy shook her curls, and looked up at him, with her mother's own expression, and said—

"Yes, I will, then."

"Will what?"

"Why, tell you why I am quite sure you are sensible."

"Well, and what makes you sure?"

"Because you are so good-natured and good-humoured; and yet your face is sad."

Ned winced a little under the diagnosis of the clever little physiognomist.

Presently he had another proof, as he took it, of her quickness at reading countenances.

"Who is that captain?" she asked, when two officers coming the other way, had passed them.

"Which captain?"

"You know there was only one," she answered.

"Yes, *I* knew; but how did *you*?"

"How very silly! By the gold lace, to be sure. Didn't I tell you I had always lived where there were soldiers? Of course I know one officer's uniform from another, else I should be a little goose, you know."

As he made no reply to this, she returned to the charge.

"You didn't tell me who the captain was, though."

"His name is Captain Rufford."

"Do you like him? *I* don't."

Again he took no notice of her remark, so she went on again.

"Mamma says I am not to talk about my likes and dislikes. Perhaps you are going to say so too. But I can't help it: I don't like that captain. He looks so greedy."

Ned smiled; she noted it: and said quickly—

"We needn't talk about him any more, you know."

"This is Mr. Locksley, dear mamma," she said, taking his hand with graceful action, and leading him towards her mother, as they entered the little drawing-room of the paymaster's cottage.

"Yes, Amy, I know it is," answered Mrs. Grant, rising to shake hands with him.

"Oh, you know him, then!" cried Amy, disappointed. She had thought to have the whole credit of his first introduction at home.

"Yes, I have had the pleasure of meeting him at Major Anderson's."

"Perhaps, though," brightening up a little, "you don't know what his name is, mamma."

"His name, dear Amy! Why, Locksley, to be sure."

"That's not the name I mean; but his own name—what his mother calls him. He says he has a very, very dear mother, and she calls him Ned. So shall I."

"Amy, dearest, you must not be rude, and take liberties."

"No, darling, I won't; but I shall call him Ned. Of course he likes that name best, since his mother calls him so. Come into this corner, Ned, and you shall see my dolls."

Mrs. Grant was about to remonstrate, but guessed, from Ned's manner, that any remonstrance

would be as much against his grain as Amy's. She took up the work just laid aside, and left them to their own devices.

"You see the doll's box is not like a common box for dolls to live in, is it?"

"Not at all. It's a Ceylon box, is it not? I have seen some like it before, but never one so large or handsome. How beautiful it is inlaid!"

"Yes, isn't it? It was given to me long before I can remember, by a brother officer of dear papa's. I was quite a tiny baby, then, and the regiment lay at a place called Tricky? Trickery? I can't remember."

"Trichinopoly?

"Ah, yes! that's it. Mamma has got a gold chain made by the native jewellers there."

Then she threw open the lid of her ivory chest, and threw herself back to let Ned look in; and perhaps to judge the better of the effect which the sight of its treasures might produce upon the mind of the beholder.

"Not like most dolls, are they?"

"By no means, Amy. How well dressed they all are: and all differently!"

"Yes! This, you see, is the poor Ayah. It was her delicate nose those rude boys broke. I've had it glued on again, and the seam painted; but

you can see where it was done, if you hold her up against the light. The nose-ring was lost, you know, which was a pity. The bangles on her arms and legs are all right though, and they are real silver. My Ayah was dressed as like this one as possible."

"Indeed? Had you an Ayah then to nurse you?"

"Yes; for I was born in India."

"So was she!" said Edward dreamily.

"Who? the Ayah? of course she was."

"No, not the Ayah; but a lady,—I mean someone I was thinking of." And he blushed up to the very roots of his hair, catching up the next doll to hide his confusion and escape farther questioning.

"This is a Welshwoman is she not, with the linsey-woolsey petticoat, and a man's hat on her head?"

"Oh yes, she is the last of my family. Mamma dressed her for me not six months ago, when the regiment was at Pembroke. You see now what my plan is with the dolls. I have one in the costume of every station that we spend any time at. Here's a Greek from Corfu, I don't remember much about that though. And here's an Andalusian, that was copied exactly from a girl's dress at Gibraltar. But here's my pet of all, except poor

Ayah." And she kissed the face so rudely mutilated by her enemies the school-boys.

"And pray what dress is hers? Another Spanish one, I suppose, with the black mantilla."

"Dear me, no! that's not a mantilla, but a 'faldette.'"

"Well I am no wiser for knowing that. So tell me what countrywoman this little lady is, with the black silk hood, that's not a mantilla?"

"Why, she is a Maltese, to be sure; and that's why I am so fond of her. See, here's her Maltese cross, of real gold filigree. Oh, I remember Malta very well, and our little house at Sliema, and the orange-trees at Bosco, and picking mushrooms out at Gozo—just as well as if it were yesterday. Were you ever at Malta, Ned?"

"No, never; but I shall go there on my way out, you know."

"Out where?"

"To India. I am not a Queen's officer like your papa; but a soldier of the Indian Army."

"Shall you go soon?"

"Yes, very."

"Well, I am sorry for that; for I wanted to be great friends with you. I say, though, is India very large?"

"Very; what makes you ask?"

"Because you might meet Ayah if it wasn't; and I would give you a present for her. Mamma always says she was such a kind nurse to me."

Then she showed him the little drawers, inside the inlaid box, where there were a few spare dresses for the dolls, and other childish treasures. When all was inspected, and he was about to leave the corner, she put her hand in his again, and asked:

"Are you going now, Ned?"

"Yes, I think I must; so good-bye, Amy."

"Good-bye, Ned. But I want to ask you one more thing before you go."

"What is it?"

"I want to know the name of the lady you were thinking of—the lady that was born in India too."

He hesitated; had there been pertness in the child's face, he would not have answered "Constance."

"Constance!—that's a very pretty name. And does she call you 'Ned?'"

"She used to."

"Oh, indeed! Well, good-bye, Ned."

CHAPTER XII.

MES. GRANT's father had been the youngest son of a Scotch peer, from whose ancient title the broad lands which gave it, had, in great part, fallen away. The pride of his family, however, had outlived its property; and it was sorely ruffled by his marriage, in early life, to the daughter of an Aberdeen merchant in the Baltic trade. When his noble kinsmen, judging him unworthy of his ancient pedigree, determined, in solemn conclave, to wash their hands of him and his Janet, Peter Muirhead, that stout Baltic trader, her father, offered to take into partnership his son-in-law, the Honourable Fergus M'Cauldie, upon the sole condition of his sinking the aristocratic prefix to his name. To this proposal Fergus acceded eagerly, and in the first heat of his anger against his relatives, threw the first syllable after the prefix. The invoices of the new firm were

headed "Muirhead and Cauldie." Under that name it strove. He and his Janet knew no hard times, until the days of the Danish imbroglio and the bombardment of Copenhagen. That disaster did them irreparable damage ; and the chief consolation they could find under its crushing was the fact that good Baillie Peter had not lived to see the firm in the list of sequestrations. Want of spirit was not among the qualities inherited by Fergus from his ancestry. He strove manfully against adverse fortune ; but in vain. Then came a keener stroke. His Janet died. Then came other business misfortunes. Last of all, he himself sickened unto death, and found himself dying without having been able to make more than the very slenderest provision for his little Elsie. He had named her after a sister, his special friend and playmate in the old days at the Keep of M'Cauldie. He had seen no more of her, for years, than of his other kinsfolk ; but the warming of his own heart towards her in his dire extremity seemed to promise that some tenderness for him might lurk in hers.

He wrote accordingly, in simple, touching terms, to crave her guardianship for the little girl, her namesake, and signed the letter with the full signature, so long disused, "Your dying brother, Fergus

M'Cauldie." Well was it for his suit he did so. The Honourable Mrs. Gillespie, such was now sister Elsie's name, had neither a very good heart nor a very bad; but she was well astride of the family hobby. The curtailment of his honoured patronymic had been in her eyes all along an offence less pardonable in her once dear brother Fergus than even the mésalliance with Miss Muirhead. She, therefore, noted the reinstated letter and apostrophe as signs of contrition and returning grace. A little lassie bearing name Elsie M'Cauldie must neither be left upon the wide world, nor even intrusted to the mercies of some stray Muirhead cousin. No letter came, however, and Fergus' sick heart grew sicker. But one day, waking from a feverish doze, he was aware of a tall female figure by his bedside, surmounted by a face whose features showed familiar through their strangeness. He turned more fully round in bed, stretched out a thin hand, and said:

"Is that you, Sister Elsie?"

"Ay, just so, Brother Fergus."

"God bless you, then, you'll tak' the mitherless bairn when I'm gone, Elsie!"

"Bide a wee till I speer at her, Fergus."

Both brother and sister had gone back to words and accent in use in "auld lang syne" at the Keep.

"Elsie, dear! Elsie!" cried the father, louder than his voice had rung for many a day.

"Ah, weel, she's a true M'Cauldie, Fergus," said her aunt, as the little girl, running in at her father's call, stopped short half way, at seeing the tall, strange lady.

"So said her mither, and was proud o' it; though I would liever have had mair blink of the mither's eye in the lassie's."

"What, your wife, Janet Muirhead, proud to think her bairn a true M'Cauldie!"

He nodded an affirmative.

"Then there was some sense in your Janet after a' maybe."

"Some!" smiled the sick man, with ineffable expression of a love that would not sicken and die with him.

"I'll see to the bairn, Fergus," said his sister: "mair or less, that is," she added, with characteristic caution.

"The Lord reward you," he replied, "as you shall deal wi' her."

The Honourable Alexander Gillespie was almost as well descended as his wife. He was a man of middling ability and easy character, over whom she exercised a temperate but unquestioned sway. Their combined family connexions, and her energetic use

of their interest, had obtained for him a lucrative appointment on the outskirts of official grandeur. He was permanent in a department whose heads were fluctuating, and high enough up to come often into official contact with his chiefs. His social points of contact with them were not a few, hers with their wives and kinswomen more frequent, and more carefully cultivated still. So Mrs. Anderson said truly, that her friend, Elsie Grant, the paymaster's wife, had been brought up among great folks.

But the Honourable Alexander had a paralytic stroke in course of time, so severe as to disqualify him for farther discharge of his official duties. The retiring pension was but small, and the narrowed income drove the Gillespies from the great metropolis to its northern sister.

The younger Elsie was the good angel of the house in Edinburgh, the kindest of nurses to her aunt's husband, and the most considerate of companions to herself, whose temper was not sweetened, nor her mind mellowed, by the change in her outward circumstances.

Though Mrs. Gillespie never ceased to regret London society, nor spared disparagement, upon occasion, of such substitute for it as Edinburgh could afford, she nevertheless availed herself to the

utmost of the advantages which her Scotch parentage and noble extraction gave her, for access to the "superior circles" of Auld Reekie. Her niece must, of necessity, often accompany her to public or private entertainments; and at one of the former made acquaintance with an ensign of a Highland regiment quartered in the Castle. Mr. Grant was not meanly gifted by nature in mind or body, and personally was not undeserving of any young lady's regard. What drew Elsie towards him, strongly and specially, from the very first, was the circumstance that he was from Aberdeen, and knew some of her mother's friends, one which, by some instinct, she never mentioned to her aunt. But that keen-witted lady did not need the additional reason which such knowledge might have afforded, for discouraging, as soon as she perceived it, the growing intimacy between Elsie and Mr. Grant. She ascertained that he had committed the rash act of entering the British army without any farther qualifications than high courage, fair talents, and an earnest admiration for a soldier's career. He had little more money than sufficed for the purchase of his first commission, and was entirely without family interest of any kind or degree. Now, the Honourable Mrs. Gillespie knew enough of the War Office, as of other offices, in those good old unreformed

times, to perceive at once how high the young ensign was likely to reach in the military hierarchy ; and she determined, neither unkindly nor unwisely, to put him at once upon his honour with Elsie. Mr. Grant, therefore, waited on her, at her own request, to receive “an intimation upon an important matter.”

“Would you make a baggage-waggon wife of the puir lassie, Mr. Grant ? I’m tauld it’s but a weary way of life,” she said, reverting, as she always did, when moved, to the old pronunciation.

“Ah, but I hope, dear Madam”—

“Weel, young gentleman, bide till your hopes are hatched a bit.”

That was fair and forcible he could not deny. Poor lad. They were addled in one way before hatched in another.

No word had passed between him and Elsie, so he applied first for leave, then for exchange into a regiment on active service abroad. Years went by. He had gotten a wound and a medal ; three varieties of fever ; two of ague ; much commendation as an active and efficient officer ; frequent sciatica ; and very grizzled hair. He was moreover, Lieutenant, without purchase, in a company commanded by a puppy having less than one-third of his own time of service, when news came that Elsie M’Cauldie

was an orphan again : for both her uncle and her aunt were dead. The regiment was, happily, no farther off than Ireland, otherwise his purse might not have allowed of the journey to Edinburgh.

The bloom was off her beauty certainly ; but that assurance of loving-kindness which Ned Locksley could read on it some years later kept a wondrous loveliness on every feature. And the poor lieutenant read a special love-look through the loving-kindness which smiled on all. Elsie was glad to see him—almost delighted—spite of what she must have thought his long and fickle desertion of her.

“ Your aunt said, Miss McCauldie, that a baggage-waggon wife would have but a weary life of it, and with that word warned me off. For your sake I took the warning, hoping and striving through bitter years to win some other thing to offer you. I have no more now than I had then : less, for I was then young and hopeful. But you are lonely, and I have brought you back one thing increased—a luckless soldier’s love.”

Elsie thought it wealth, and took the treasure for better or worse. The few pounds her father had left her were but little increased by a legacy from her aunt. Lieutenant Grant applied for a pay-mastership by which to add a few pounds to his

annual pay. He was actually appointed on the sole score of his character ; and a brevet on a birth-day made him Captain. What can the vulgar outcry mean about deserving officers overlooked in our army ?

Ned's new little acquaintance, Amy, was, as she had told him, her parents' only child, born and bred, as her dolls demonstrated, at a time when the stations of her father's regiment had been shifting with more than usual rapidity. Having once visited the Paymaster's quarters, and having done so, thanks to Miss Amy, in the character of a house-friend. Ned often found his way there again; most of his evenings be spent either with the Grants or with his first friends, the Andersons.

Personally, therefore, he was not much affected by the evening amusements of his comrades in barracks, nor disturbed by the "skylarking," of which he heard either in O'Brien's rollicking brogue, or in the Major's wrathful murmuring against "unseemly practical joking." Captain Rufford, indeed, by way of daring his dependent, Jones, had suggested to that officer—since Mansfield had been dipped in a solution of liquid blacking and water, and Garrett had an eyebrow shaved, his dress-boots filled with the contents of a mustard pot—that it was hardly fair to let the third "griff"

off unscathed. But Jones fought shy of the suggestion, alleging Ned's intimacy with the Major, "who'll make the confoundedest kick-up about conduct unbecoming a gentleman and an officer, if there's a scrimmage with his friend Locksley."

In truth, Ned was known to share his senior's aversion to the noble sport of "badger-baiting," and looked as if his teeth, albeit unofficial, might meet through where they bit, as well as the Major's. He, therefore, enjoyed immunity from annoyance, until the arrival of a fourth youngster, who had been prevented by illness from joining on the same day as himself and the other two. This Milward was a lad of gentlemanly appearance; of well-proportioned, but very slender frame; of handsome, but very delicate features; with a mouth which might have been reckoned pretty in a girl, but betrayed in one of the ruder sex symptoms of weakness and irresolution. He showed the same distaste as Ned for stupid and noisy rioting; but with a shrinking very different from the masterful bearing of the self-possessed Etonian. The latter, who had left the mess early one evening, was at work some hours later over his Hindustani, when he heard a light, quick step run along the passage, and a hurried, hesitating knock against his door.

"Come in."

In came Milward, rather pale, but with a flush on his cheek bones.

"Hulloa, Milward! Sit down in the big chair whilst I put the books away."

"Thank you. Hush! Is that them?"

"Is that who? What's up, old fellow?"

"To tell you the truth," said Milward, turning red all over now, "I took the liberty of running in here because there was a threat of 'spunging me with my clothes on.'"

"Whose threat—Rufford and that lot's?"

"Yes."

"Well, that romping is bad enough when O'Brien and his set are at it; but they do it for fun. As for that brute, Rufford, and that fool, Jones, they are unbearable. I'm glad you came in here. I'll give them a lesson if they follow you."

"It's very kind of you," said Milward. "I was ashamed of bolting in, because I know you hate this kind of thing."

"I do; but I wasn't eight years at Eton without being equal to this emergency, mind you, Master Milward. Ain't they whitewashing the corridor up here?"

"Hardly whitewashing. It's a dirty yellow ochre in the pots outside."

"All the better. Just pick the stoutest sticks

out of the faggot in my coal-bunk, will you, and look in the right-hand corner of the cupboard below for a coil of rope there is, I think. I'll be back in a second."

In he came again accordingly, with two big pots of the dismal ochre wash.

"What on earth are you at?" asked Milward.

"You'll see time enough. But be quick: I heard them banging open your door downstairs as I went out."

Ned produced a hammer and a few stout nails out of the miscellaneous stores of his cupboard. Then mounting on a chair he nailed three or four stout sticks at right angles to the lintel. They made a sort of projecting platform, to the edge of which he fastened a length of rope nailed at one end to the woodwork of the door. Then he poised the pots upon the sticks so nicely that the door in opening must jerk the rope's end, and an avalanche fall.

"A very neat booby-trap," said he. "Let the stormers assault."

He put a bolt across the door, remarking as he did so:

"Staple won't hold long. Hon. Company's barrackmaster is not much of an ironmonger."

They heard two or three doors opened and shut

NED LOCKLEY,

with a bang along the passage. Then
knock at his

"Hello!"

"Seen Milward anywhere?" inquired the
of Jones.

"Oh dear, yes! He's in here. We're ha-
ving and muddling," quoth Ned, in modulated tone.
Jones was at a nonplus. He had suggested t-
Milward might have taken refuge in some oil
drifter's quarters; but had not reckoned up
finding him with Locksley.

There was a noisy deliberation outside, then
another knock, and a more decided voice than the
gentleman's cried insistently.

"None of your nonsense, youngster, come out!"

"What I?" said Ned, blandly still.

"Not that milkay of a Milward, quick now!"

"Nor all we've done the muddling," quoth Ned,
in reply.

The answer came in a savage kick, which made
the oil-drifters tremble; but could not dislodge
them, so firmly was their adjustment.

Ned took no notice. A second kick followed,
and a rush against the door.

"You had better not, gentlemen, for your own
sake," cried Ned, with perfect good-humour; "I
can't bear being disturbed at tea."

There was laughter outside, apparently at the baffled assailant, whose wrath, waxing hotter, vented itself in another kick, which almost upset the pots, and loosened the treacherous staple alarmingly.

"Pray don't, sir; you'll disturb your digestion by such strong exercise after meals."

Crash went the staple. In rushed Rufford. Smash went the pots upon his head; and his best uniform—they had dined in full-dress that evening—was dripping and done for.

"There! My best milk-jug broke!" said Ned. "Beg pardon, gentlemen, you may pick up the bits outside."

With one vigorous shove, he sent the Captain reeling into the passage, followed by a volley of potsherds. He slammed, and double-locked the door.

Rufford was furious; but the laugh was loud against him, not only among the strangers, well soaked with claret, but even among his own admiring jackals. He put the best face upon the matter that he could, and beat a hasty retreat to change his drenched regimentals before seeking consolation in cards and broiled bones. Thenceforward he watched, with not unnatural eagerness, for some opportunity of turning the tables upon his antagonist; but came to the sullen, though

sound, conclusion, that he was; in most things, more than a match for himself. He changed his tactics; took no notice of Ned; but instead of attempting to bully young Milward any more, treated him with studied politeness and cordiality, paying him many little attentions, which began insensibly to win the weak lad's confidence.

Jones, as usual, took his cue from the Captain; and pasty-faced Mansfield, the "griff" with a turn for cards, took his from Jones. Milward soon began to fancy that he could do no better than conquer his first prejudices, rub off his home fastidiousness, and prove his manhood by conforming to the customs of such kind comrades. This somewhat nettled Ned; but, absorbed in his sorrows and his studies, he could not afford the matter more than a passing thought upon occasion.

These studies he cherished no less as a present solace than as a preparation for the future, and found in them escape from thoughts and feelings which the mechanical duties of the drill-ground left active still. Though not popular with comrades of his own age and standing, from whom he kept, in some respects, aloof, his good sense, his good-humour, and his proficiency in all manly exercises, fruit of his double training on Cransdale Moors and in the playing-fields at Eton, kept him from

the invidiousness of actual unpopularity. His chiefs formed from the first the highest opinion of him, and the Major had already caused his name to reach the superior authorities, as that of a young officer of extraordinary promise. For some chance reason, the stay of his batch at the Chatterham dépôt was unusually prolonged; but the time at last came in view when they must proceed to their distant destination. Messrs. Rufford and Jones, who had early intimation of the fact, felt, that if profit was to be made out of any of them, it must be made without farther delay. The design upon Garrett had been abandoned. He really was too stupid to learn play, too little spirited to play without learning. Milward gave better hopes; weak enough to be led, he was quick enough to learn, and conceited enough to be coaxed or carried beyond his depth. The worthy pair found Mansfield an admirable, though unconscious, assistant in their design. He had a very tolerable taste for gambling, with not much more acquired knowledge of play than Milward's superior wit soon enabled him to gain; and he being pitted against Mansfield, nothing loath, learned confidence in his own skill and judgment.

So they fooled him on; sometimes in fair duel, so to speak, sometimes in square games, where the

presence of a confederate, as partner on either side, made the direction of matters both easy and unsuspicuous. Rufford had poor luck at play, and was subject, though he handled his cards well upon the whole, to unaccountable inadvertencies, which would sweep off in a turn the previous gains of steady skill and equable fortune. Milward was sharp enough, as he thought, to take special note of this; and having had some unexpected minor successes to whet his appetite, determined on a regular set-to with the captain. To beat the man who had bullied him at first, and then had come round and acknowledged his social and manly qualities, would be greater glory than even gain. Jones made some apparent attempt to dissuade him from this rash purpose.

"Old Rufford knew a thing or two. When put upon his mettle, he was an ugly customer. In fact, he shouldn't himself half like a stand-up fight with him —if it wasn't, that's to say, for those absent fits of his; which made such 'mulls' of his play now and then."

"Ah, but that's the very thing, you see, Jones. I own I am an inferior player, in some respects, to Rufford; but I have a considerable power of concentration:" said the silly lad, drawing his lips tighter across his teeth, as if with instinctive con-

sciousness of the feeble point of his handsome countenance.

"Yes, you command your attention better than Rufford, I think," answered the other; "which is strange enough, seeing what an old hand he is."

"I'll tell you what, Jones, it's all bosh about not getting old heads on young shoulders. Some youngsters are born with young heads on; but others with old ones all along; don't you see, eh?"

Jones did see, very plain.

At the bottom of the long mess-room, at the Company's barracks, Chatterham, were too little sitting-rooms, right and left. One was in general use as a smoking-room, the other, comfortably furnished, was but seldom used, except as a kind of drawing-room, when there were many seniors, or "distinguished visitors," at the dépôt mess. Rufford and Jones had weighed very deliberately the arguments for or against making this room the scene of the gambling tournament.

"It was one of the scaliest points about young Archer's affair, Jones, that Plumer of 'the Dashers,' held the party in his own rooms. Floods of bosh were poured out upon it. We can't afford 'ugly circumstances' so soon after. Now, the little room to the left is public, though private to all intents

and purposes, for there's not a fellow goes in there once in three months."

"No, that there isn't," said Jones; "and it's fusty enough in consequence."

"Never mind that, my boy; we can leave the door open to air the atmosphere, which will look fair, and above board, you know, in case of impertinent inquiries. The odds are 'any thing to one' against any fellow lounging in, as we shan't play till very late, eh?"

"All right then. It's a judicious idea enough."

Next morning, Ned, who by chance had got up unusually early, took it into his head to breakfast before, instead of after parade. To the discomfiture of the messman, he ensconced himself in the uppermost corner of the long room, demanding coffee and poached eggs at an abnormal hour. Before these were ready, the old Major looked in.

"Oh, there you are! You are early this morning. Here's the book I promised you. I keep up my old Indian habits, a canter before early parade; so I'm off round the Long Meadows. Look in to-night, will you; the Grants are coming?"

The book was a relief, spite of the crabbed Oriental character. Ned kept on deciphering it to while away the time, with occasional interruptions, to shout at the dawdling messman.

"Breakfast was so long in coming, that the second cup of coffee was but just poured out, when the bugle parade-call rang in the barrack-square. Up jumped Ned. Where should he put the Major's book? The little sitting room was a safe place; so he opened the door, went in, and placed it on a stand in the corner by the mantelpiece.

Parade was dismissed, when a young engineer officer cried out:

"Locksley, didn't you say you should like to see the 'flying sap' to-day? There's a party going down to the lines with Dickson. They marched half an hour ago; but I have a trap outside, and I'll drive you down, if you've had your breakfast."

"Well, I have had half of it, or thereabouts. All right; I shall be glad of a lift."

And the young men drove off together.

The Sappers and Miners had a tent on the ground. And there was lunch, in due time, at some interval in action. Then when the serious work was over, as men and officers were still full of "go," a couple of "scratch elevens" were got up, and Ned must needs play. "Too late for mess," was the word when dinner-time was come; but as the lunch-commissariat had been liberal, a fair enough ration was fidgeted out all round. When they got back to barracks he had only just time to

dress and run down to the Major's. It was past eleven o'clock before he left. The Andersons and he walked home with the Grants, as the night was very fine. Twelve struck by the town clock some time before he reached the barracks. As he passed the sentry, he bethought him of his book.

"I'm not on duty to-morrow morning, and shall have time for a grind."

So he went up to the mess-room in search of it. In the antechamber he asked a sleepy-looking waiter for a flat candlestick, saying that he was going into the left-hand sitting-room for a book, left there that morning.

"Then you won't want no light, sir," said the servant, "there's several officers as is in that little room to-night, sir."

Before he was half-way up the long room itself, his ear caught a burst of exultation from Milward's voice, noisier but seemingly somewhat thicker also than usual.

"By George! who'd a thought it? That's the fourth game I've beaten you, Captain. I should think you were most sick of it by this time."

"Fortune of war!" said Rufford, in answer, quietly. "Turn and turn about you know."

"Ha! ha! yes! but your turn seems longish a coming," cried Milward. "Jones, my boy, give us

a glass of champagne to toast our luck, eh? No, confound it, none of those long-necked apologies for a wine-glass. Give it us in a tumbler, man; can't you? I'm thirsty. Here, Rufford, here's better luck to ye!"

"Don't drink now, Milward; don't if you'll take my advice," answered Rufford. "I never do when at play. Keep your head cool, for I mean to cut out your work yet for you. I must have my revenge."

Ned, who by this time was in the room, noted the Captain's look and tone at these last words, with misgiving. He had a half mind to stay and see that Milward, with all his folly, got fair play. Second thoughts told him there would be little use in that, as he couldn't do much more than tell an ace from a knave on the cards himself. He went therefore to the corner to take his book. As he turned his back to do so, he thought, and yet could not make sure of it, that he heard an ominous whisper,

"What brings the Major's jackal poking his nose in here, eh?"

This turned him again. He determined to stay. "Any objection to one's looking on a bit?" he asked of Jones.

"Oh dear, no!" said Milward, before any one else could answer. "Sorry I can't let you cut in your-

self, if you'd like to take a hand ; but it's a regular stand-up between Rufford and me to-night. Have glass o' wine ?”

“ No, thanks !” He put his foot upon the hind rung of Milward’s chair, crossed his arms, and looked on. No one could object to this, after what Milward had said ; the circumstance would have been too suspicious.

The first game of Ned’s looking on, Milward won again, to his own unbounded satisfaction. The second, Rufford called for double or quits on the whole score of the evening, and won it. Nothing could be more moderate than his conduct to all appearance.

“ Tell you what, Milward, we’ll leave off, if you like, now ; not a scratch on either side.”

“ Hardly a revenge, is it ?” said Jones.

“ No, confound it, none at all,” backed up Mansfield.

Two other officers, who had been half dozing on a sofa, started up, inquiring what the row might be ; and on hearing the case concurred “ it’s monstrous good-natured of Ruff ; but hardly fair upon him.”

No such incentives indeed were needed to spur Milward on, for the greed of gambling was on him just then, as well as its mere recklessness. But if any

one word had been wanting, the chance expressions of these lookers-on—who had neither knowledge of his intended victimization, nor interest in it—supplied its room.

“Good-natured of him! Ha, ha, ha! That’s a good ‘un. I have beaten him five games out of six; and he’s to be so kind as to let me off, because he’s had the luck to get the best of a double and quits. And that was a regular fluke,” ran on the doomed simpleton. “I don’t want to say any thing unpleasant, but the blundering way he played those clubs of his, last hand, was almost enough to ruin any cards he held. What’s your stake, Ruff? My deal.”

“Well then, if you ‘mean business,’ youngster,” said the Captain, with a new assumption of superiority in his tone galling enough, though by no means outrageous, “say twice what we did the last time.”

Milward winced at the proposal. His antagonist, who faced him, could see what Ned, from behind his chair, could not—a tremulous motion of the weak upper lip.

“A leetle too much of a good thing, eh? How’s that, with your judgment, to back your luck?”

“Done with you!” cried Milward. “Please cut; the deal is mine.”

The cards were balanced evenly, yet in the end the Captain won.

"We play on, of course," said the loser, nervously, and in a hurried, would-be hectoring tone. "Stakes as before. I may right myself yet."

"As you please," answered the Captain.

Milward leant eagerly forward. All crowded round. Even Ned unfolded his arms and laid his elbows on the back of Milward's chair, bringing his chin down on his hands, that his eyes might be nearer the board.

Rufford's play was very deliberate. Milward's not quite so much so. Do what he would, they could all detect an occasional tremor in his hand. Again, however, the mere chances of the game seemed to be fairly divided between them. Up to the last trick it would have been unsafe to decide upon the winner.

At this crisis, Rufford leaned back in his chair, and looked, with sarcastic smile, into his adversary's eyes.

"I really beg your pardon; but it only strikes me now. If you should win this game, it will be but a drawn battle. Not worth one's while that, after all said and done."

"Well what of it?"

"Why let's double stakes as they stand now; and let these cards decide."

Milward hesitated, and his hand trembled evidently.

"Funky?" sneered the Captain, with a look for which Ned, right opposite, would have liked to send his fist between his eyes. Rufford read his meaning right enough; and caught at the notion of a double revenge, like lightning.

"What! Show the white feather, Milward, with your original backer at your back, too? He'll be ready to do for you the same kind office he did for me, no doubt."

"As how?" said Milward.

"Whitewash you, should need be, to be sure."

There was a titter, in which Milward joined hysterically.

Ned's brow darkened. It was his old weak point to pick up a challenge at any cost.

"Come!" said the Captain. "Can't you find the pluck between you both?"

"Shall I?" said Milward.

"I'll halve the damage," whispered Ned, beyond himself at the growing insolence on Rufford's face.

"Done with you, then, Rufford," cried the other.
"Knaves!"

"Queen!"

"King!"

"Ace!"

"Let's see, how does it stand?" said the Captain, with affected unconcern. "Hundred and twenty-five, doubled once, two hundred and fifty. Doubled again, wasn't it? Just five hundred. I like round numbers. If a cheque won't be convenient, I'll take an I. O. U. There's an inkstand on the side-board in the mess-room, I believe."

CHAPTER XIII.

THAT active and intelligent officer of the county force, Police Constable Hutchins, had need of the fullest exercise of his intelligence and activity.

The case was one of "howdacious burglary," as he himself said, at Rookenhamb.

There could be no suspicion of connivance with any of the servants, for the doors of the passage inwards had not even been attempted; whereas forcible entrance had manifestly been made from without. There were plain enough traces on the fine gravel under the window, of the presence of the "parties concerned," who had taken, however, the precaution of scuffling, in such wise as to baffle any attempt to identify boot-marks.

Had they been "put up to the plant" by any of my Lord's establishment, they would not have made the very serious mistake of breaking in on the left,

instead of the right side of the great stone mullion. This mullion divided a two-light window of very doubtful "Gothic," the two lights being, in fact, two separate windows, lighting two separate little outer-rooms or passages, and the heavy clumsy mullion, itself a device for concealing the butt end, if one may say so, of the party-wall which divided them. Any one effecting entrance from without through the right-hand window, would have the door of the strong-room, in which the plate was kept, on his left hand, the party-wall on his right. Should he effect it, as the depredators did on this occasion, through the left-hand light, the party-wall would, of course, be on his left hand, the entrance to a sort of cabinet of curiosities on his right. The burglars having, as it would seem, a vague notion that valuable booty lay hereabouts, were wanting in the knowledge, accessible to any inmate of the house, of the relative positions of the plate and china stores.

It must have been a horrible disappointment to them after all their trouble, risk, and really hard work in forcing the well-fastened door, to find themselves in a museum rather than in a silversmith's. In a merely scientific point of view, the confusion of their topographical acumen must have been mortifying; and the financial failure of the speculation

even more sad. One really could have found little heart to blame them had they vented their disappointment on the china generally, and enriched Lord Royston's collection by some additional specimens of "crackled" porcelain. Their abstinence from this obvious gratification of feeling gave P. C. Hutchins a respectful estimate of their prudence.

"Smashes o' crockery," remarked that officer, "hoften spile sport by givin' alarm to hinmates. Parties as can't keep their temper are hapt to put their foot in it at work o' this kind."

That they were practical philosophers, as well as men of self-control, and schooled in that wisdom which coined the proverb, "half a loaf, better than no bread," appeared from the farther circumstance, noted by the keen inventorials eyes of Mrs. White, that they had taken with them, after all, such matter for consolation as the most valuable and portable of the non-earthenware articles of virtu could afford.

"Whatever will my Lord say, to be sure? There's things and things is gone, as he'd sooner a lost dozens of silver forks and spoons as sich."

The hue-and-cry raised in the county was ineffectual. Futile was the activity of P. C. Hutchins, vain his intelligence and that of his local superiors. It was with mingled feelings of indignation and

pride that he found himself brought at last into contact with detectives of vulpine reputation from the metropolis. Actual acquaintance with such ornaments of Scotland-yard could not but in itself be gratifying to a professional man; but the local constabulary feeling enjoyed—how should it not?—a profounder, if less ostentatious, gratification in the baffling of metropolitan acumen by the mystery which provincial acuteness had failed to penetrate.

"And you'll keep your eyes open, officer," said Inspector Ferritts to Hutchins, as a parting salutation before leaving for town.

"Catch a weasel asleep, Inspector!" answered that officer.

Tommy Wilmot had caught several lately, not asleep indeed, but still had caught them, and presented their lithe little corpses to Mister Watson for the increase of his admonitory exhibition in the open air. Poacher against poacher! It was almost as unfair as the mutton bones, which the wolf reproaches the shepherds for grilling, in the old Greek fable.

But the fact was, that Tommy was as tender of the game, in his way, as Mr. Watson himself. He was not the man to rifle "nestisses," nor to pity the riflers on four feet or on two. He was as good as

an underkeeper in matters of preservation, only he could not keep from sharing sport in due season. Father and mother were still obdurate, refusing their sanction to his regular enrolment under Watson, who by way of accustoming them to what he saw was, after all, inevitable, would ask of Tommy, in their presence, to do odd jobs in the keeperin' line for him, just now and then, on pretext that some press of work was leaving him no regular hand unemployed and available. Now, it befell, not long after the failure of the London detectives at Rookenhamb, that irregularities and offences had been rife upon the Cransdale trout-burns on the upper moors. Certain fishes had been found dead on the banks, at higher and drier elevations than any to which their own saltatory performances could have enabled them to reach. No "spoor" of otter was traceable, nor did the spotted silver of the luckless trout show marks of the incisors of their amphibious enemy.

"Can't say whether 'um's bin wired or netted, or what not," grumbled the old keeper.

"Tell 'ee what now, Tommy, set a thief to catch a—no, there; no need to take no offence, Tommy. I've a knowed you a'most as long as your own father, lad; and though I owes 'ee a grudge or two on fur and feather'count, I don't believe there's

a 'onester young feller not hereabouts, all but the poachin.' Howsomedever, what I meant was this : my Lord ain't pertickler about the upland burns, so I don't want no 'rests made, nor nothin' like ; but if you'd look into this here a bit, Tomamy, and see what it is they does, and who does it, and let 'em know we can't quite stand it, not if things is to go on as they 'as ;—why somethin' mought come on it, pertickler o' makin' things pleasant wi' your father and me about 'ee, Tommy!"

Never had Mr. Watson been known by Tommy to deliver himself of so lengthy a discourse. He was much moved by the circumstance, and by the evidence it disclosed of an interest in his own heart's wishes, and of a good-will, surviving in spite of frequent, aggravated, and old-standing provocations.

Nay, Mr. Watson went so far as to beg the loan of Tommy's services, by personal application from his father. It could not, under such condescension, be refused ; so Tommy, strapping a fishing creel across his shoulders in token of his temporary rank on special service, betook himself to the moors to right the wrong of the moorland trout.

It was three days after entering on this confidential enterprise that he determined—having completed a first cursory reconnaissance of the

whole campaigning-ground—to make detailed and minute examination of all and several the “likely places,” where lines, nets, or wires might lurk unperceived. The hot noon found him at a notable spot, kneeling upon a ledge of stone which formed the brim of one of the deep basins, wherein the eddying waters stayed their speed below the Pixie’s pillar, not far from the spot of Ned Locksley’s adventure with poor Benjy.

He had tucked up his coat-sleeve at the wrist, and passed his hand cautiously along the under-side of the ledge beneath the water, without encountering any suspicious substance. But such a superficial search proved little. He stood up, passed the strap of the fish-basket over his shoulder, and deposited that receptacle upon the grass, in which the cheery chirrup of a million grasshoppers made merry music.

He untied his neckcloth, loose as it was, and thrust it into the pocket of his velveteen coat. Then he divested himself of that garment utterly, and tossing it aside upon an ant heap, caused a total eclipse over that region, which must have disconcerted the astronomical expectations of the ants—if they have any. As he wore no waistcoat, nothing farther was needed to set his upper limbs at liberty but to tie his braces round his waist and

roll up his shirt-sleeves to the shoulders. This done, he laid himself flat, face foremost, upon the rim of the pool again, his head downwards, after a most apoplectic fashion, one hand grasping the outer stone ledge ; the other, groping deep in the cool water.

He was thus all unknowing of the approach of a blue-coated figure coming up the bank at a cautious distance from the water, which, by reflecting, might have betrayed its advance. But when the "determination of blood to the head," necessitated by his posture, became temporarily unendurable, he looked up, and turning him round upon his seat, was aware of the presence and close contact of Police Constable Hutchins.

"At it again, eh ?" said that functionary.

"At what again, pleaceman ?" answered Tommy.

"Come none o' that ere," retorted the man in blue.

"None of what ere ?"

"None o' your sorce young man, when took in the hact o' sich ingratitude."

If the features of Police Constable Hutchins had ever caught from the countenance of the Chairman of Quarter Sessions any vestige of its force of magisterial rebuke against offenders, some reflection

of that awfulness, he thought, must at this moment be causing Tommy Wilmot's heart to quail.

It is sad to state, however, that this hardened offender showed a contemptuous composure under the just wrath overhanging him. After a moment's hesitation, during which the thought of jerking the peace officer over his head into the pool caused his fingers to contract and clutch at nothing, he said, in a tone between provocation and playfulness :

"I don't want no rows wi' nobody. Now git along, pleaceman, do!"

"I'm a goin' to git along, in discharge of my dooty, young man," answered Hutchins, unhesitatingly ; "and do you git up and come along wi' me, without makin' no rows, and it'll be the better for you."

Tommy stood up, not to comply with this summons by any means. Still the sense of responsibility, and even of official dignity, was on himself as on his adversary ; so he contented himself with saying,

"Tell 'ee what now, pleaceman ; this ere's some mistake o' yourn. I'm a doin' o' my dooty, and you med go do yourn ; I don't want no more words about it."

"Likely not," answered the other ; "has for words, you may keep 'em for the Justices, if so be you'd rather. But if wirin' o' trout *his* your dooty,

young man, apprehension of parties offending *his* mine, and no mistake."

"Oh, that's what you 'm up to, be it," cried Tommy, tickled by the policeman's blunder. "Ha'nt 'ee 'eard as Muster Watson's set I to look arter the lads that's been a fishin' foul up 'ere now."

"I've a heard nothing of the sort," answered Hutchins, with evident incredulity.

"Then you've 'eared it now, and that's 'nuff, I s'pose," growled Tommy, interpreting and resenting the doubts upon the other's face.

"What!—set a thief to catch a thief, has Mr. Watson, eh?"

"Thief yoursen', you puddin'-faced peeler!" cried young Wilmot, enraged beyond measure at hearing from a foe's lips the same ugly phrase which had hurt him from a friend's.

There was a fulness of feature, combined with absence of colour, about the worthy policeman's countenance, which accounted for, if it did not justify, the disparaging epithet long since fixed upon him by the less reverent portion of the village lads. His temper was gone, whither Tommy's had preceded it.

"Likely tale, *hindeed*; to take a Cransdale keeper hout o' Cransmere lock-up. A hofficer of my 'xperience ain't to be took in so easy, no, not by no

means." And he looked round for any suspicious circumstance, on which to found a formal charge.

"What's in yon basket, eh? fair fishin' gear, or foul, I wonder. I shall *hinsist* upon yer shewing me, young man!"

"Wish 'ee may get it!" said Tommy, sulkily.

"Hindeed!" cried the policeman, making a quick snatch at it, as he spoke.

But Tommy likewise snatched at it, catching the leather belt only, which broke with the violence of the tug on either side, and, the lid opening as the basket fell, its contents rolled out upon the trampled grass.

Tommy Wilmot was thunderstruck.

"Wusser nor I thort!" cried the constable. He whipped out a pair of handcuffs, and had one of them on one of Wilmot's wrists before the young man recovered his senses, and darted a few yards aside.

Then the policeman pounced upon an object on the grass, caught it up, and thrust it into his left-hand breast-pocket in a moment.

He rushed at Wilmot, who shook him off; but made no attempt at escape.

"So sure as Heaven's above—" began the young man.

"Shut up wi' that," cried Hutchins, and rushed

at him again; but again his powerful opponent shook him off, and stood at bay, without attempting to escape.

"Tell 'ee what, pleaceman, you let I goo hands free; an' I goos wi'out no more ado, I does. But you and I med both be dead i' bottom o' yon pool afore 'ee takes I down to Cransmere han'cuffed!"

The policeman was no coward, and would have done his duty to the death, if need were. But he knew his man, and knew him by experience for more than his own match in any encounter. Moreover he saw him stand his ground, where a race of liberty was clear before him.

"Put on yer coat, then, and come along."

As Wilmot obeyed the order, the constable picked up the other scattered articles, and returned them to the basket, of which he took possession; then, side by side, in silence, he and his prisoner on parole went downwards from the moor.

"I really can see no course but to commit you for the present," said Squire Jekyll, when he had heard the policeman's story in his private jnjustice-room, and had ascertained from Wilmot that, beyond a simple and absolute denial of any guilt or guilty knowledge on his own part, he had no account to give of the damning circumstance.

"There can be no doubt as to the identity or

ownership of this article," continued the magistrate, taking from a drawer in his bureau a list of the missing articles advertised after the Rookenhamb robbery.

"Let me see," and once more he picked up from the table what Hutchins had seized upon the grass and pocketed. "It corresponds exactly;" and he read off from the paper—"No. 56, oblong tortoise-shell box, lined with ivory, outer surface inlaid with gold ornaments in the 'renaissance' style; centre, an oval medallion, with portrait of 'Madame de Pompadour' in miniature, by Boucher; initials, F.B., under lady's left breast." There can be no doubt that this is the box described, forming part of the valuables abstracted from the family mansion of Lord Royston. You must see yourself that, upon your total failure to account for your possession of this box, or, more, exactly, of its presence in your fish-basket; it must be my plain duty to have you kept in custody till further investigation."

Tommy shook his head mournfully; he had no objection to offer. But whilst the magistrate was sealing up the stolen box, he asked of him whether he might communicate with Mr. Locksley at the Lodge in the Park.

"By all means," answered the Squire; "will you

write, or shall I send down and ask him to come ever?"

"Ah, do 'ee, sir, and beg o' him, for any sake, to come over at once; on'y don't 'ee tell un, please, what I'm in trouble about, till I've a seed 'un my sen.'"

This the Squire promised also.

The handcuffs still dangled upon Tommy's wrist. The policeman locked the second loop round one of his own with an apologetic look.

"I'm hanswerable to justices for 'ee, now, you see, young man."

"All right," said Tommy, in profound dejection.

"But I say, pleaceman?"

"Well, what?"

"I'd tak' it kind o' 'ee to say nought o' what's brought me so; ne sooner nor 'ee can help, ye know."

"Never fear, young man," answered the constable, with a pompousness, which not even his intended good-nature could suppress. "Discretion is the dooty of a hofficer in my position."

Before dusk Mr. Locksley was ushered in. He was mounting for an evening ride over the estate when Squire Jekyll's messenger arrived; so he set off immediately.

"Policeman over zealous, I suppose," he said, cheerily, on entering. "I have seen Watson, on my way over, Tommy ; I understand it's all right about your roving commission as keeper of the trout-burns. But you've had so many difficulties about that sort of thing before, that you mustn't be hard on the constable for having his suspicions."

Tommy shook his head.

"Wish it wur that, sir. This is 'nother guess sort o' thing this is."

"An unlucky blow, Tommy ? You were always too ready with your fists."

Mr. Locksley's kind, apologetic tone was more than the lad could bear. He laid his arm upon the table, and his face upon his arm, and sobbed aloud.

"Tommy Wilmot ! man ! Look up like a man, and tell me what's amiss."

"They thinks it wur I as broke into my Lord's at Rookham, they doos !"

"About as much as I did, Tommy !" said out, at once, the generous, open-hearted gentleman under whose eye the boy had been born and bred.

"God bless 'ee for that, sir !" cried the prisoner, starting to his feet, and shaking off, as an evil spell spoilt, the despondency which had cowed him

hitherto. He took a turn up and down the narrow crib ; then begged his good friend to sit down upon the single chair, whilst he himself sat on the raised boards on which the rare inmates of the Cransmere lock-up slept.

“ What on earth can have put such a notion into their heads, Tommy ? ”

“ I suppose them as put that box into my basket,” answered he, with a forced laugh, which was a miserable failure.

“ What box ? You must remember I know nothing of what has happened, except that I find you here, where I am sure, as I said, that you have no right to be on any such score as that.”

Thus encouraged, Tommy told him precisely what had passed, and of his own utter amazement at the unexpected appearance of the costly toy.

“ It’s most unaccountable,” said Mr. Locksley, “ and I should do you no service in hiding from you that, in the eyes of any one who didn’t know you as I do, the thing would look very serious. But you shall have the benefit of lawyer’s advice when the case comes on, and I’ll see the squire myself and find out when it will.”

“ Thank ‘ee sir,” said Tommy with a sincerity of tone which made up for the scanty allowance of grateful words.

"What shall I say, at home, Tommy? Stories go about so, we shan't keep it long in some shape from father and mother, I fear."

"No! nor I wouldn't wish to 't," he answered, "on'y I'd sooner have 'em 'ear it from a genelman like you, sir, as I don't think I dun it, than be vrichted out o' their vour wits like by some lyin' gossip."

"All right, then, Tommy; I'll call in at once when I get over. I suppose there's nothing I can do for you to-night here? Shall you want any money?"

"No, thank 'ee sir! I've a bit i' my pocket if I shuld."

Mr. Locksley held out his hand to the poor lad, who wrung it with an eager grip, which told his appreciation of the friendly confidence put in him under such cloudy circumstances.

The elder Wilmot was a man of little judgment, and therewith pig-headed, as will not seldom befall. Mr. Locksley was surprised and shocked to find that Tommy's own father did not, as he had done, repudiate instinctively the supposition of the lad's guilt.

Disobedience to the just and reasonable commands of parents is, doubtless, offence enough in itself, and the fruitful parent of offences; but Tommy's dis-

inclination for pursuits of horticulture could hardly be set down as regular rebellion, since he did continue to work among the lettuces and cabbages. But there was more of the despot than of the father in John Wilmot's estimate of his own authority. He seemed to think that hands which showed small aptitude for handling rakes and waterpots might naturally hanker after a burglar's crowbar. When he had heard Mr. Locksley's story and had recovered from the first emotion of surprise, he set himself to inveigh rather against his son's undutifulness than against the enormity of the suspicion of his guilt. The mother, too, true to her early prejudice against all poaching characters—whom, indeed, she had but too good cause to think capable of the most outrageous crimes—wept bitterly over Tommy's disgrace, and wrung her hands in despair, saying little else than this:

“Guilty or not guilty, 'tis the poachin' as has brought it on us!”

An expression of opinion, embodying as Mr. Locksley felt, but too much of a truth likely to tell against her boy upon his trial.

The “big room” at the Cransmere Town-hall was not very spacious, but such space as it contained beyond what was absolutely required for the magistrates' table was crammed to overflowing when

Tommy was "had up." Three of P. C. Hutchin's blue-coated comrades were present from the county town itself, under the command of an inspector; and even their united imperiousness could scarcely keep the eager, prying townsfolk from sweeping on to the tabooed parallelogram, to the confusion of magisterial order and the abrogation of all formal judicial action whatsoever.

There was a side room at the upper end where the magistrates assembled, and whence in due time they issued in awful conclave to take their seats within the jeopardized "reserve." Squire Jekyll was there, and Mr. Locksley, Sir Henry Hebblethwaite, and Mr. Mapes, of Maperly; the magistrates' clerk, of course, an attorney on the part of Lord Royston's man of business, and another retained, according to Mr. Locksley's promise, "to watch the proceedings on behalf of the defendant." The lock-up had no means of communication with the "big room" save through the principal staircase, and P. C. Hutchins, with Tommy in charge, had no small difficulty in pushing his way through the crowd, even when assisted by a spirited diversion "ab intrà" upon the part of the inspector himself. Poor Tommy Wilmot! He was holding his head high, as becomes a lad of spirit, conscious, as it would seem, of innocence, when he first came in

contact with the edge of the packed assembly. But his head hung on his breast before the policemen had elbowed and hustled themselves and him half through. The hot breath of his slanderers literally made his cheek to burn, for their lips almost touched his ear as he was pushed past them.

“Who’d a thowt it, o’ Lodge-gairdner’s son too? But, there, pride must have a fall. Them Wilmots was a stuck-up lot allays—!”

“Pleaceeman don’t look so main bad nayther: thay sed, as Tommy had nigh throttled ‘un too, thay did.”

“How much wur it he’d spent o’ what he gotten for the goods, eh? ’Twur old Levi, at Saint Ivo’s, bought the main o’ it vrom ‘un, I eared saay—”

“You see what cooms o’ poachin’, Billy,” said one hortatory matron to a loutish lad of fourteen or fifteen, in a tattered smock, beside her.

It cut Tommy to the heart, that his own mother said little else to him.

“Poachin’ indeed, old gowk,” objected a notorious setter of springes to the speaker. “There’s as good as Tommy Wilmot has been up here along o’ poachin’, as ‘ud be sheamed to steal the valley o’ a toothpick, let aloan ‘ousebreakin’.”

This roused him again. To be cowed before such a creature as “Snivelling Sam,” was a degradation

to which he could not consent. He set his neck stiff, his teeth firm, and his eyes straight, and looked his gainsayers in the face once more.

"Lor'! 'ow 'ardened 'e do seem, look 'ee!" said several charitable females, in a breath.

The process was little likely to soften an offender, so far.

A first and unexpected consolation was in store for him, however, when he had reached the outmost row. Foremost amongst the strugglers against that living hedge of constables, so conspicuous for gaps, stood Benjy Cottle, the poor idiot boy. Who when he saw his friend Tommy captive and distressed, seemed with an apprehension quicker than his wont, to know that something was wrong, and forthwith began to vent his own alarm and grief in piteous howls.

"Don't 'ee hurt 'un, pleaceman, now, don't 'ee, ow, ow, ow!"

"Silence!" cried Sir Henry Hebblethwaite.

"Silence!" re-echoed the inspector.

But Benjy's lamentations rent the stifling air.

"Remove that noisy brat."

"Suttinly, Sir 'Enry," said the ever officious Hutchins. Sooner said than done. There was no thrusting Benjy summarily through the dense mass of townsfolk; and as for handing him out over their

heads, as suggested by the inspector, his lively kicks and bites, and other practical remonstrances, made it a task of evident impossibility.

"Can't any one get him to hush up, at all events?" asked the less irascible squire.

"Perhaps, his friend, the defendant," suggested, meekly, the magistrate's clerk.

This was an admirable idea, and, seconded by the defendant aforesaid, proved eminently successful. Upon being remonstrated with, and reassured by Tommy, and farther bribed by a promise of future peppermints, Benjy ceased his lamentations; but held his place in the front row still.

Justice thereupon entered undisturbed upon her august proceedings.

They were few and simple. The policeman was sworn, and gave his evidence uncontradicted, of course, by Wilmot. The latter, when called upon to account for the presence of the box in his basket, could only suggest that some one, who had a spite against him, and was himself concerned in the robbery, must have placed it there.

"Some one who has a spite against you! Have you any reason to suppose that any person has one?" inquired Sir Henry.

"Not exactly," he answered.

"Not exactly? that's not exactly an answer, is

it? Who is likely to have a spite of the sort against you?"

Tommy could have bitten his tongue out. The truth was, his acceptance of office under Watson had been counted an apostacy in certain sporting circles in the neighbourhood. It had come to his ears that they had been aware of it, though the police had not; and that opinions derogatory to Tommy's sense of honour and good fellowship had been expressed, in terms less choice than forcible, in the tap-room of the Blue Cow. Threats of "serving him" out had accompanied these candid expressions of opinion; and his exculpatory theory had certainly been, that some of the dregs of the "poaching lot" in Cransmere having tampered in the robbery, had fixed on this means of inculpating him, and diverting suspicion from themselves.

But the slanders he had just heard against himself, though they made him savage, had no power to make him mean.

Every man, woman, and child, but Benjy, had some harsh word against the poacher on their lips.

Now, he had been a poacher, with distinctions and reservations, of a sportsman-like character, it was true; still a poacher, and for that belied. He was feeling with keen indignation, in that self-same hour, how cruel the injustice might be which made

“poacher” and “thief” convertible terms. He shrunk, therefore, for the lad had a fine heart, from endorsing that injustice, even against possible enemies. Not another word, upon the subject of any spite against himself, could the magistrate now get out him.

“I suppose it would be right,” said Sir Henry to his brethren, “that there should be some formal identification of the stolen article?”

“Just so,” said the attorney present on Lord Royston’s part. “Mrs. White, Sir Henry, the housekeeper at Rookenhamb, is here, prepared to give evidence.”

Mrs. White was at this juncture introduced.

“Where is the box in question?” asked Sir Henry. Hutchins produced it, sealed up, as it had been by Squire Jekyll, on the afternoon of Tommy Wilmot’s arrest.

But when the seals were broken, and the paper wrapping thrown aside, and the box held out to Mrs. White for her inspection, there was a fresh outburst from Benjy:

“Gi’ it I! gi’ it! Yon’s my coffin, my pretty little coffin, for the mousey!”

“Silence!” again cried Sir Henry.

“Silence!” again re-echoed the inspector.

“Hush up now, Benjy,” said Wilmot, “like a good lad.”

Far from it. Was this indeed a hall of justice, and his lawful property to be kept unjustly from him?

"Gi' it I, pleaceman! Oh do, pray, please gi' it I! My pretty coffin, for my poor dear mousey!"

"What's that the brawling brat says?" inquired the peppery Baronet. "If the police force of this county were worth their salt, they would know their duty better than to let us be interrupted by idiots after this fashion."

But the quick ear and attention of the attorney for the defendant had noted the protestations of the boy. There was a possible clue, so he caught at the thread eagerly.

"With your leave, and that of the bench, Sir Henry, this seems to me to deserve considerable attention. Allow me, gentlemen; is that your box, my boy?"

"Nonsense!" cried Sir Henry. "How can the box be the boy's, when there's Mrs. White here to prove it part of Lord Royston's property. Besides which, how could a brat like that come by a box like this?"

"Ah, that indeed is quite a separate question. But excuse me, Sir Henry, I appear for the defendant, and prefer conducting my client's case my own way."

"As you please then, Mr. Attorney," growled the Baronet.

The lawyer turned to Benjy.

"Is that your box, my boy?"

But Benjy's fitful intelligence failed to detect a friendly tone in the question, and he gaped upon the questioner with open mouth and lack-lustre eyes. This was embarrassing. The attorney was, however, a man of expedients. If Benjy's attention could be turned from himself again upon the toy, he knew that his chance of eliciting an answer would be tenfold. So he took it in hand, with "by your leave, Sir Henry," and passing it close under the idiot's face, repeated his question, "Is this your box, my boy?"

"'Ees it be!" cried Benjy, clutching at it.

"And where did you get it?" boldly asked the attorney, with a double inward apprehension: lest the child should obstinately refuse to answer; or lest he should blurt out something which might mar, instead of mending the case for Tommy.

"Nigh t' peat-pools," answered he, without a second's hesitation.

The attorney could not resist a glance of satisfaction towards Sir Henry.

"Where are these peat-pools?" he asked of the policemen.

"Further edge of the moor, towards the quarries," said two, in a breath.

"Well you're a good boy, and shall have some peppermints," continued his interrogator, who had noticed the soothing effect of that expectation upon him previously.

It occurred to Sir Henry, that there might lurk herein a savour of tampering with the witness; but the examination of Benjy being necessarily informal, he feared to risk its utter interruption by objecting.

"Didn't you say it was mousey's coffin, eh?"

"'Ees it be. Poor dear, wee mousey!"

"And what have you done with mousey, my boy?"

"Put 'un in yon basket," pointing to the fishing-creel upon the table.

"Ah yes! poor wee mousey!" said the sympathizing attorney. "So you put him in the basket, box and all, did you, till you could bury him?"

"'Ees, put 'un into pit hole like t'owld saxton," replied Benjy, with unusual lucidity, before Sir Henry could object that the attorney must really not put such leading questions.

"How came this poor child to have access to your basket, Wilmot? Has he been in your company lately?"

"Why, yes, sir; I tak' my vittles at his mother's these day or two, since I wur set to mind the burns up at moor."

"Gentlemen!" said the attorney, turning round to the bench, "here is evidence, most unexpected and most unexceptionable, of the fact that, as my client has all along asserted, this box was placed without his privity in the position where it was accidentally discovered by the policeman. The very circumstances under which that poor innocent's witness has been elicited remove, thank God, any suspicion of collusion. My duty is not concerned with suggesting how the child came into possession of the box, but is best discharged by claiming, as I now do, for my client an instantaneous and honourable acquittal."

There was a cheer from the audience at this little speech. Tommy had learnt, however, to hold their judgment cheap. He turned on them a look of such contempt as few could fail to understand.

"What!" said Sir Henry, in a confidential undertone to his brother magistrates, "are we to let off this poaching scamp, and lose the first clue that has been come across to the Rookham affair, on the score of an idiot's cock-and-bull about a dead mouse?"

"By the way," interrupted Mr. Mapes, "the boy

said he put the *mouse* into the basket; the *box* was rather a suggestion of the defendant's attorney, wasn't it?"

"Policeman Hutchins," he then asked, "the boy says he put a dead mouse into the basket; did you happen to see one when its contents fell out?"

"No, sir. Nor I don't think there could have been one neither, for I picked up what was on the grass after pocketing the box; and I didn't see no mouse, I'm positive."

Policemen are but human. The vanishing of all prospect of a share in the reward advertised for the fortunate man who should prosecute to conviction any party concerned in the great Rookenhamburglary disposed him to attach less weight than Tommy's attorney did to the evidence in favour of the defendant.

"And what did you do with what you picked up, Constable?" said Tommy's adviser.

"Shoved hall into the basket agen."

"Has the basket been opened since?"

"Not as I knows on, sir."

"May I suggest a search of its contents," he asked of the authorities.

"By all means," they assented.

One by one the articles contained were handed out and laid upon the table. A bit of chalk, a

lump of bees'-wax, an old steel tailor's-thimble, a pocket songster, a hank of stout thread, a rude apology for a fly-book—with some admirably tied flies in it, however, as Mr. Mapes, an enthusiastic angler, at once observed; a clasp-knife, a roll of gut, and, last of all, a very dirty, tattered pocket-handkerchief. Then the basket was held upside down and shaken. No mouse appeared.

A shade of disappointment clouded for a moment the attorney's face; Sir Henry brisked up again; but once more Benjy interposed to guide the investigation.

"'Ees, yon be my poor mousey, tied up in t' hanchefut."

"Tied up in what?"

"In t' lad's ankecheef," explained Tommy.

"Shake it out, Policeman," said the Squire, who shrank from contact with the unsavoury rag himself.

It might once have been, as its manufacturer intended, a rough white cotton article imprinted with the representation of a blind man and his dog, surrounded by the versicles of the beggar's petition. But if no other colouring matter had ever wrought confusion in its design, the strong, mordant purple of the juice of squashed blackberries had effectually obliterated all. The holes and tatters went im-

partially in both directions of warp and woop. No mouse fell out, but in one corner two knots appeared, and being with some toil unfastened--sure enough, the corpse of a poor little shrewmouse was discovered in an early stage of decomposition.

"I think after this corroboration, gentlemen," again interposed the attorney, "I need hardly renew my appeal. It is bare justice that my client should not only be discharged, but with the acknowledgment that there remains neither particle of evidence nor ground of suspicion against him."

Though it was evident the magistrates assented, there was no cheering this time; for Tommy, as if to forbid it, turned round once more and scowled angrily at the assembly. Then he put his hand up to his forehead, pulled his forelock towards Mr. Locksley, shook hands with his attorney, and began at once, with scant ceremony, to elbow his way out of the crowd, whose sympathies he scornfully rejected.

There was a farther difficulty with Benjy, whom P. C. Hutchins took upon him to detain, and endeavoured with no sort of success to cross-question about the finding of the enamelled box. "Nigh t' peat-pools" he repeated once or twice, and thenceforward devoted his whole flickering attention to the shrewmouse's unsavoury carcass. Being allowed

to wrap it up in his handkerchief again, he consented to accompany the policeman home, upon stipulation that opportunity should be afforded him of investing in peppermints the sixpence which, with praiseworthy faithfulness to his promise, the triumphant counsel for the defence had bestowed upon him. Hutchins was commissioned by the magistrates to make careful inquiries from Widow Rizpah, and empowered, if necessary, to search her cottage.

It was not, however, till some weeks after that anything appeared to corroborate or invalidate Benjy's assertions; and then one of the Cransdale under-keepers picked up, not five hundred yards from the peat-pools, an old-fashioned silver pencil-case, which Mrs. White identified as also forming part of Lord Royston's stolen goods. But a sullen indignation glowed like red-hot embers in the mind of Tommy Wilmot. It seemed to him, upon regaining his liberty, as if there was little more warmth in his parents' reception of him than there had been readiness in their conviction of his innocence: and the forwardness of the Cransmere gossips to believe the worst of him was an iron that entered into his soul. The long-coveted underkeepership—should his father consent to his accepting it, as Mr. Locksley was most anxiously urging on him now to

do—seemed to have lost its charm, it was already tainted with the reproach of being a turn-coat's bribe.

A wall of ice, upon which the glow of his own anger made no more thaw than an Esquimaux's camp-fire upon a "hummock" in the Arctic seas, seemed to have interposed between his father and himself; and even his mother's tears seemed to freeze upon it into mere icicles, because he suspected that she, possibly, still suspected him. The warm breath of a genial confidence could alone melt the dense and cold obstruction, and from no quarter of the domestic heaven did such a soft south wind blow.

He took, without apparent increase of reluctance, the paternal rakes and watering-pots in hand, and went to work once more among the "cabbidge and lattices" which his soul spurned. He brooded and brooded, but hatched no egg of intent, cockatrice or wholesome barn-door chick; until one day, mowing on the lawn by the lodge windows, without evil intent of eavesdropping, certain words smote his ear between the tinklings of the sharpening-stone upon the scythe.

"So Ned sails this day three weeks. Oh, Robert, I can hardly think all real now."

He didn't catch the answer.

"But we'll go down to Chatterham, dearest, won't we, to spend the last week at least with him?"

Tommy moved off; but he had heard enough.

"Go for a sodger, eh? To the East Injies, along with Master Ned. I can't abide things as they is at home much longer, nor I wun't."

Two days after, Mrs. Wilmot was crying her heart out in Lucy's little breakfast-room, reproaching herself, too late, with a woman's ready repentings.

"Oh deary, deary, deary me, ma'am, to think we shuld a druv' un to 't. Our Tommy's tuk' an' started.

CHAPTER XIV.

MILWARD was in Ned Locksley's room, the morning after the gaming scene, before that early-rising subaltern was out of bed. On his countenance sat blank despair. Ned was frightened as he raised himself upright on the tent bedstead to face him.

"We made a bad business of it last night, old fellow."

Milward, as pale as death, shook his head, and said nothing.

"Can't say I like the looks of it," continued Ned, "for more reasons than one. First and foremost—you mustn't breathe it for worlds, you know, as I know nothing of cards—I'm not cock sure that Rufford's deal was fair that last hand. Next and worst, I was an intolerable ass for interfering."

"What must you think of me, then, for embarking on it?"

"Hope no offence,' as the 'cads' say; but I

never did exactly take you for a model of wisdom, Milward."

"Ah! but you little think what a fool I am ! And worse, what a knave!"

"For Heaven's sake no, Milward, not that I hope. You may have been dupe of that gaming lot; but no 'chum' of theirs, I'll lay my life."

"You're very kind to say so; and in one way right, though you'll think worse of me when all's known."

"Not much worse than of myself, if half as ill, I take it," said the other; "but it don't want twenty minutes to parade. Suppose you abscond during my ablutions; and come up with me when we're dismissed, to conclude the council of war. I'll tell my soldier to get us a bit of breakfast here, so that we shan't be interrupted."

"All right," said Milward, with a look which belied the trivial expression.

Parade was over. O'Brien was talking with the Major. "There must be some mistake," said the latter; "Locksley's the last man in garrison to be mixed up in such a mess. Besides which, it was late before he left our house last night."

"Sorra the morsel o' mistake, Major," quoth the Irishman. "Young Mansfield told me but now. He was present, first and last."

"I don't doubt he was," growled the Major, quite willing to convict that ensign upon evidence not admissible against the other.

Just then, as if to strengthen O'Brien's statement, Locksley and Milward passed arm in arm; and Ned, instead of stepping aside to shake the Major by the hand, and ask after Mrs. Anderson, as usual, only nodded as he went by. O'Brien winked significantly at his senior, who turned on his heel, half offended, muttering to himself as he left the ground—

"I shan't and won't believe any thing to that young fellow's prejudice, till I have it from his own lips; that's all about it."

At the door of his own quarters a surprise awaited Ned. A tall sergeant of the H.E.I.C.'s "Europeans," whose bilious look showed what had sent *him* home upon recruiting service, saluted, and said,

"Mr. Locksley, sir, here's a recruit; leastways intending, who won't take the shilling he came for, till he's had speech of you."

He stepped aside, uncovering, so to speak, his rear rank man.

"Why, Tommy Wilmot, is that you?"

"Yes, Master Ned. Beg pardon, Cap'en Edward."

"Promotion don't go quite so fast in the Company's service, Tommy. But what on earth brought you here?"

"Want's to list, Cap'en," he answered, determined to give Ned his "brevet," "if so be; that is, as I can mak' sure o' gooin' to East Injies along wi' you yoursen, sir."

"Well, that wants consideration. Tell ye what, sergeant, I'll see to this young man's affair. I'll see, too, that you get your bounty for bringing him all right, if he's attested; so you needn't wait about."

Sergeant saluted and disappeared.

"You, Tommy, come up stairs after us; and I'll tell my man to give you some breakfast whilst we are getting ours. I have business of my own on hand just now that won't wait; but I'll hear your story by-and-by, unless you are in a hurry."

"Not a mossel, Cap'en," said Tommy.

Milward made a vain attempt at breakfasting. The first sip of coffee nearly choked him, and brought tears into his eyes. Ned, grave enough himself, couldn't quite understand him. He thought it doubtful for a moment whether Milward would only turn out "soft," or, as he himself had seemed to intimate, a "scamp."

"The first thing, of course, is to pay Rufford.

I don't think we are prepared to dispute the fairness of his play, whatever private opinion we may entertain."

"But I've not two hundred and fifty in the world," he said. "Not more than thirty or forty, when my Indian outfit's paid."

"Hadn't you that sum staked before he called on you to double, and I promised to go halves?"
The lad's pale face turned purple.

"Yes! I had!"

Ned said nothing; he had not been prepared for this. He happened to have made up his own account with the Army-agent two days before the card-play. Angry and off his guard as he was when he egged Milward on, it was distinctly present to his memory at the moment, that his balance was just £257 14s. 6d. It was bad enough to reflect, as he had done before getting off to sleep last night, that he should have to take his first step in the expensive eastern life with a capital of "seven pounds, fourteen shillings, and six pence;" but he judged himself rightly fixed for his folly. His whispered offer to Milward was merely meant to justify the extra risk. It had never entered his honest head that the lad had pledged his own honour for a stake, which, if he lost, he was unable to pay.

"I told you you would think me more knave than fool, when all was known," said the other, with great effort, under his breath.

"Well, it wasn't a nice thing to do," Ned answered. But he repented of the words the moment after, when he saw how completely Milward was crushed under their weight. His elbows were on the table, his face between his fingers, out of which came rolling great scalding tears.

"A pretty devil's device this gambling!" thought his comrade, sick and wroth at heart against himself for having let his proud impatience of defiance betray him in sanctioning the madness of the luckless boy.

Any farther scolding, even if he had felt himself entitled to administer it, would be misplaced now. The question was how to give a dram of comfort. But Ned's bottle of consolation was ominously empty. Milward kept on sobbing; but made no articulate sound. At last the other thought he heard him say,

"My mother—my poor mother!"

This was an opening.

"Don't take on so, Milward, man. I've got a mother too—just about."

Ned's speech was of set purpose, under rather than up to the level of his true sentiment. He

could not trust himself to words expressive of much feeling.

"And a father too, first chop ; we'll pull through somehow."

"Ah ! but I have none. She's a widow, poor dear, with only me to look to. My sisters and she have little enough to live on !"

Merciful Heaven ! He had lent his hand to push a poor widow's hope over that precipice !

Yet out of the black darkness of that thought, one ray of light came flashing on his generous and open mind. He had indeed a father, first chop ! What a word ! He smiled involuntarily at the expression. He had indeed faith in his father ; and faith, in an earthly father, can "move mountains" out of a young man's path in life, sure token —would he but discern it—of the miraculous might of faith in a Father which is in heaven.

A minute's silence was enough to form and mature his plans.

"Now, Milward, will you be guided by me ? God knows I've guided myself ill enough, so far ; but I see my way out now. Will you put yourself into my hands ?"

"Only too willingly," said the heart-broken boy.

"As a general rule, then, I hate hiding things. If there were any sort of use in it, I should say,

'tell your mother at once!' but it would only distress her. Some years hence, when we've all got wiser, you may and must."

"How can I raise the money without application to her? Though I'd sooner coin my blood into gold."

"Every grain of which, if you could, she and your sisters would be the better of, if I understood you."

"They'd suffer any thing sooner than my dis-honour. I wonder if Rufford would spread it over a term of years, till I could save it out of my pay?"

"Ask that 'leg' any favour!" cried Ned, in a voice of fury, little becoming his new mentorial office. "I'd sooner see us both tied up in a bag, Milward, and chuck'd overboard on the voyage out, by a long chalk."

Milward opened his eyes. He began to understand that some other passion than that of gambling had animated his backer on the previous night.

"Rufford shall be paid, at any rate, in three——— No, let me see: he'll get it by the eleven o'clock post from Cransmere, and couldn't answer by the day mail. No; he shall be paid, every farthing, in four days at the farthest: but you must give me your word of honour for one thing."

"What?"

"For this : that you neither touch a card, nor make a bet above 'five bob,' for the next five years. By that time we shall both be shot, or dead of the liver complaint, or grown wiser, or something. There now ; clear out, if you've had your grub," quoth Edward, falling into his preventative slang, again, on purpose. "I'm on recruiting business for the Honourable Company ; and my recruit's been kicking his heels outside this half hour. Cut along ; there's a good fellow." To prevent any possible objection, he opened the door and bawled out —" You, Tommy ! Tommy Wilmot ! Come in."

Milward, perforce, went out : Tommy came in. Ned's judgment on his case, when he had heard it, was that, on the whole, he had probably left his home all for the best. There were some regulation difficulties about his being allowed, if enlisted, to leave the dépôt before completing certain drills, for which the period of Ned's departure would not now give time. There was a finance difficulty, farther, about his passage out overland. The latter, as Ned's own money matters now stood, seemed formidable at first ; but it appeared that Tommy had a certain sum in the Cransmere Savings' Bank, which would nearly cover the extra expense, if only the regimental impediment could be got over. For this, Ned's first application must needs be to the Major.

He thought he observed in that worthy commandant's manner an unusual wistfulness, for which the nature of the petition about Wilmot would not account.

"Any thing ail you, Major?" he asked, when the old officer had written down, methodically, the points of Tommy's case, and promised to refer it at once to superior authority. "Mrs. Anderson all right, I hope? She was looking very well, I thought, last night."

"And is very well this morning, thank you. But I say, Locksley," for the Major hated roundabouts, "what's this humbugging story they've trumped up, about your being in with some of that Rufford's card-sharpening last night, eh?"

"We mustn't say 'sharpening,' Major. We've no proof the fellow don't play fair. But Milward and I, between us, lost five hundred pounds to him last night, I am sorry to say."

"Sorry, indeed! That young Milward's a confounded young fool."

"And that young Locksley, Major?" asked he, with a frank good humour, which was irresistible.

"Is another, of course; and so am I, for not giving him, since I have got him, the 'wigging' he deserves."

Ned laughed outright.

"It's all very well, youngster," went on the Major, with a tentative frown ; "but I can't bear to be taken in. Didn't you tell me once that gambling was your detestation ?"

"I did ; and so it is."

"That you knew no more of cards than the difference between a diamond and a spade ?"

"No more I don't, Major."

"Little wonder you lost. What induced you to play ?"

"Nothing ; for I didn't. I only backed a bet."

"More reckless gambling than the game itself. What made you do it ?"

"A sneer on Rufford's face, Major, and a kind of challenge on his tongue."

"I see !" cried the old soldier. "Do you pick up every glove a fool or a knave throws down ? I thought you wiser, my boy."

"I am learning to be so, sir. This is my latest lesson."

"Costly," said the other. "Can you make it convenient to pay ?"

Ned found it hard to answer with perfect openness, because the secret difficulty was no secret of his own. The gray Major marked his hesitation.

"I have no scapegrace of a son to break my bank for me, my boy. So my balance at the paymaster's

is on the right side. If you should want a cheque"—

"Major! I have no words to thank you," said the young man, interrupting. "I shall never forget such generosity. But I have no secrets from my father. I have written to him already, and posted my letter as I came by. He'll set me right by return of post, I know."

The sonless man gazed on him as he turned to leave the room. Oh, had he but such a scapegrace son himself, with no secrets from his father, who would set him right by return of post.

The letter he had written ran thus:

"Dearest Father,

"I have been and broken mother's jar again. I am a greater fool than you think me: much greater than I thought myself. As little able to command myself as when Phil and I shot with cross-bows on the lawn some years ago. I took up a challenge at cards, in the way of a bet on them—you know I can't play—and along with another man, whom I should have kept out of haym's way, contrived to lose in all £500. He can pay none, poor fellow, of which I was not aware, or I hope, for his sake, I should not have been so cruel as to back him. I have £250 of my own, or rather of what you gave

me for a start, and I now want to know whether, in your great kindness, you will lend me an equal sum. I am sure you would regret as much as I that my name should be mixed up in any shuffling about a debt 'of honour,' as they call it, of dishonour, as I think it should rather be. Tell dearest mother that she shall have every detail of this fine exploit when, please God, she comes. I need not tell you how ashamed I am at having to doubt whether I ought not to sign myself

"Your *undutiful*, though affectionate,

"NED."

The answer came, as he had not doubted, by return of post.

"Dear Ned,

"Enclosed is a draft on Messrs. Child for £500. It is crossed, as you see, and must be endorsed by you, and cashed through the Chatterham banker or the regimental agent. Your mother and I come, please God, on Thursday week.

"If you want telling that once is enough for an 'escapade' of this kind, you are not the Ned I take you for; but I shall ever be, as I am,

"Your loving father,

"R. LOCKSLEY."

He drew £500 in crisp bank notes, and put the letter with them into Milward's hands. As he did so, his heart was swollen with joy and pride at his father's trustful answer to his trustful application.

"I told you he was first-chop, Milward, and you needn't fear. I have not betrayed your name, even to him: if one could 'betray' a thing to such as he. But mind I have your word of honour for five years clear."

"You have, and fifty at the back of them, if you think fit."

"See that rip of a Rufford gives you a receipt on a sufficient stamp. I don't trust him any farther than I see him: indeed not half as far. Of course my name don't appear in the transaction. And there's an end, I hope, of one ugly chapter in our united histories."

Amy Grant was beyond measure anxious for Mrs. Locksley's arrival. Ned had told her that his mother would come, and from that moment she began to count the hours as eagerly as he. Her sudden friendliness for him, did not, as children's sometimes will, die suddenly, like flowers they pluck in haste at play and stick rootless in the ground to "make a garden." Nor did her shrewd guess at the true complexion of his countenance shift and flit, as the summer dragon-flies, which children love

to watch, though bright and quick as those winged needles of live steel. She was sure of the sadness, which others failed to read upon his features. Childlike and womanlike she longed to know whence that shadow was cast upon their pleasant light. With womanly rather than childish self-control she stayed upon her lips the question often almost asked in lively talk of Ned. Perhaps she should read an answer, unasked, in his mother's eyes: perhaps hear one at her mouth.

The very day on which Mrs. Locksley was to come, Amy was at the Andersons, and Ned on his way down to the lodgings he had secured, chanced to look in.

"Are you going to meet her, Ned?" asked the sunshiny little maiden, eagerly. "Do, pray, let me go with you to the coach-office."

"I think they'll post down, Amy, as my mother is not much of a traveller."

"Oh!" said Amy, with such a sudden cloud of disappointment over her summer sky. She wasn't quite sure what Ned's answer might mean. A postchaise and pair was a luxurious mode of travel beyond the poor Paymaster's purse in those days; and Amy's idea of posting had reference to letters rather than ladies on a visit to their sons. Yet she guessed that the pleasure at which she caught

was imperilled, and that she was no longer likely to share the gladness of her friend's meeting with his mother. Ned could not help understanding all this in the sound of that one monosyllable.

"I am going to ask a great favour, Mrs. Anderson," he said, "of yourself and my friend, Amy, here. I am not certain when my mother will arrive; but, I think, it will be within an hour or so. She would dine early on the road, she said, and I was to have tea for her. I want Amy to come and make it, for I am a poor hand at that. Besides, I must get some flowers in the chimney ornaments and on the tables: my mother dotes on flowers. Amy makes exquisite nosegays. I could do nothing like her in that line either. Do you think Mrs. Grant would mind her coming?"

"Oh, you dear good Mrs. Anderson," cried Amy, clapping her hands with glee. "Oh do say yes! Oh do say no!"

"'Say yes, say no,' which do you mean, child?"

"Both, to be sure, dear. Say 'yes' I may go: say 'no' mamma wouldn't mind. Of course she wouldn't: how could she?"

"You are wilful children, both. I suppose you must have your way," answered the Major's wife, laughing.

"Children, indeed!" cried Amy, opening her

great eyes with an affectation of supreme displeasure. "Why Ned's a grown-up soldier, with a sword. I should think he was certainly thirty or forty years old. And you know, Mrs. Anderson," —with much dignity—"I am ten on the sixth of December!"

Ned was right about her taste in flowers, whatever may have been her talent for making tea. They bought a gorgeous bunch or two at a stall he wot of en their way down. From the little shrubbery of the lodging-house garden she gathered green boughs enough to set them off. Even the grate became a bower after expulsion of the shavings from between its bars, and its redecoration by Amy's busy, tasteful fingers. She had scarcely given the finishing touches before the "yellow chay," with its blue-jacketed boy and his knockkneed "posters," was grinding the gravel at the door. Hidden behind the curtain, Amy saw the greeting between mother and son; but before his father had stepped out to grasp his hand, she had run out of the sitting-room and fled like a sprite to hide herself elsewhere. It had just gleamed on her that they might find the presence of a stranger irksome. Her little heart beat violently when she heard them come up the stairs making straight for the very room in which she was ensconced. Self-possessed,

however, in this emergency, she opened the door wide to let them in, concealing herself behind it; then, darting out as they entered, she ran to the sitting-room again.

" Didn't I see some child go past when we came in?" asked Mrs. Locksley of her son, who waited outside on the landing to lead her downstairs to tea. " Such a lovely child. Was it the landlady's?"

" I don't think there are children in the house," he answered; " at least I noticed none when I came down to see that your rooms were ready."

" Well, I saw one. She only flitted past; but she looked lovely. Such fairy-like golden curls!"

" Oh, that must have been Amy, with the curls, then."

It had never struck him that the child was indeed so very beautiful. An image of womanly beauty, nowise childish, though still in freshness of glorious youth, filled his eye and heart so full, that they took little note of what besides was beautiful.

" Amy?" said his mother, " what Amy?"

" Amy Grant, the little girl of the old Paymaster and his pretty wife. I must have told you about them in some of my letters."

" Yes, to be sure. I think you said the Paymaster's wife had a sweet countenance. Is Amy like her?"

"I scarcely know. Come, let me see. Is Amy like Mrs. Grant? I think she is, a little. You shall see both, and judge for yourself. Meanwhile, Miss Amy," he continued, opening the sitting-room door, "does the honours of the tea-table for us this afternoon. Here, Amy, here's my mother."

Amy turned fiery red, and would scarcely look up, though she made a little curtsey full of formal grace, and held out her hand. Mrs. Locksley took it, drew the child nearer, parted the sun-beamy silk on her forehead, and kissed it very kindly.

Amy's apprehensions vanished. She threw her arms round the neck of the motherly figure which bent over her, and rising on tiptoe whispered in its ear :

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"What for, dear child?"

"For being in the way here when you came to see your Ned."

The answer was given on her soft cheek.

By-and-by came Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Grant, who at first refused to intrude upon the new arrivals; they were only in search of Amy. But Mrs. Locksley herself ran out with Ned, pressing on them to waive all ceremony and come in. How could she too soon have the pleasure of making acquaintance with those to whom she owed so much

for their kindness to her son? So she drew them with gentle force into the room, where, much to Mrs. Anderson's amusement, Amy sat at the tea-urn. Mamma, when she saw her there, was a little anxious lest her darling should have been pert and forward; but Ned explained that it was at his mother's request, as well as at his own, that she held the post of honour; and Amy's self-composure was so free from affectation or impudence, that her mother could, after all, find little fault.

The three ladies being thus brought together, and Mrs. Locksley discovering that both the officers' wives took the warmest interest in her son, the three families spent more of those parting days together than would have been possible otherwise. So long as she herself might not lose sight of him for one unnecessary hour, even Lucy's jealous love could not wish to separate him at the last from friends whose affection and esteem were so genuine in themselves, and so honourable to him.

Amy watched Ned and his mother with unflagging interest, and the keen speculation so often rife in a childish mind. She was so young, it passed even her quick wit to conjecture all the covetous longing which streamed from Lucy's eyes upon her only child. But she noted that their loving agony was ever most intense when fastened on him;

whereas the sadness seen in Ned's, as she had seen it at the first, was saddest, not when they looked upon his mother, but away from her, into some dim distance.

Amy showed only one of her dolls to Mrs. Locksley, the Ayah of the dolorous nose.

" You see she was my nurse : for I was an Indian baby. You were not, were you ? "

" No, dear child ; I was an English baby, born close by where I now live, at Cransdale."

" But Lady Constance was not, was she ? She was born in India, too, like me, your son said. She must have had an Ayah to nurse her, too."

" Yes, I suppose she had," Ned's mother answered, much wondering how he had brought himself to let that name cross his lips.

Amy determined, she scarce knew why, yet determined, in her half wayward, half earnest childishness, to ask her question now.

" You love Ned very, very much, I know, and you are very, very sorry that he's going to India, far away ? "

" Yes, indeed, dear Amy."

" And we love Ned, though not as much as you, you know ; and we are very sorry he's going away."

" I know that Ned has found kind friends," his mother said.

"Does Lady Constance love him?"

Lucy was deeply troubled. The child looked on her with such hushed, eager sympathy, that she knew not what to say in her amazement. At last:

"They have been like brother and sister all their lives."

"And is Lady Constance sorry for Ned's going?"

"Indeed I can hardly say."

"Is Ned very sorry for leaving her?"

"I think so."

"More than for leaving you."

Do what she would, the mother's sob broke out.

"Oh forgive me, forgive me. Don't cry, dear Mrs. Locksley."

The little arms were thrown about her neck, the golden curls about her face, the child's cheek pressed close to hers, and the fairy-like lips were kissing the tears away.

"I am so sorry, so very sorry, to have made you cry. I only wanted to find out what made dear Ned so sad!"

The next day was their last in Chatterham. On the third after it the Peninsular and Oriental boat would leave Southampton. Those were the earliest days of the overland mail. Ned, with his father

and mother, walked down late in the afternoon to take leave of the Grants. The last words were being spoken, the door was ajar, when Amy who had kept one hand behind her all along, came forward and offered to Ned what she had been concealing.

"Take this, for my sake and Lady Constance's."

"What is it?" said he, much astonished.

"Only my poor Ayah. I thought you wouldn't mind her nose being stuck on, since she was Lady Constance's nurse as well as mine."

But mamma, who had not heard what she said, saw that she was thrusting too large a parcel upon Ned, and on that score interfered.

"His trunks are full, and packed and gone. How could he carry such a clumsy keepsake all the way to India, silly child!"

"Oh dear! what shall I do then, when they are just off, and I've no time to think of anything?"

Looking rapidly round the room, she caught sight of her mother's open work-box on the table. In one second she had pounced upon a pair of scissors, and had cut off, not a lock of hair, as the measure of such mementoes is reckoned, but a very cluster of her golden silky curls, which she thrust into Ned's hand, and ran away.

The time was come. It was low water at South-

ampton. The 'Cleopatra' swung at single moorings, in mid channel, steam up and ready to paddle off at first flow of returning tide. Now that Ned had fully taken the irrevocable step, his mother felt no longer constrained to pen back her flood of grief at parting. It almost unmanned him. Both his father and he insisted that she should not accompany him, as she proposed, on board.

Ned left his parents in each other's arms, and went alone on foot, from the inn to the pier. There, a little steam-tender waited for the latest batch of passengers. Tommy Wilmot, whose difficulties had been got over, thanks to the Major's interest, was already on board, with the very last carpet-bag and cloak.

Two stately female figures stood under one of the Custom-house sheds, close by the gangway of the little steamer. Both had thick veils down. As Ned came by, one drew him towards her, lifted her veil, put her arms round him and kissed him, almost with the fervour of his poor mother's last embrace.

"God bless you, Ned! Mind, you have *two* mothers!"

The other did not raise her veil, nor touch his face with her sweet lips; the last time she had done so was under compact that she must never do it

more. But her two hands, of exquisite shape and softness, pressed the young soldier's between them with a loving force ; and, from behind the veil, he heard her distinctly say :

“ Mind also, you have a true sister till I die !”

CHAPTER XV.

"CAPITAL fresh eggs!" cried Keane Burkitt to his mother, at the other side of the breakfast-table. "Positively creamy!" demolishing the third and last in the eggstand. "They might have boiled one for you, though!"

"There were no more in the house," she said; "the milkman only brought half-a-dozen last time."

"Just like him, a thoughtless rascal! He knows, or ought to, by this time, that I relish a fresh egg. I've half a mind to set up a lot of Dorkings for my own benefit. You could look after 'em, and see their eggs marked with a criss-cross, to make sure of my always having 'em myself."

She went on with her dry toast.

"There," said he, after a while, again pushing a small dish over to her, "that's what I do call

streaky bacon ; not so badly toasted as usual either. There's a little bit left ; you can taste it, and see how I like it 'done.'"

"Thank you ; but it's almost cold now ; luke-warm bacon ain't nice."

"No ! That's what I keep it on the hob for, till I've eaten my eggs, when I can get an egg fit to eat, that is."

He threw himself into an easy-chair by the window.

"Just tear the cover off the *Times*, and hand it to me, will you ?"

He shoved the 'Supplement,' much loved by ladies for 'births, deaths, and marriages,' behind the cushion at his back, and turned the colossal broadsheet inside out, to get at the City Article. This he read over to himself, audibly yet inarticulately. His eye wandered next over the 'ship news.' In the paragraph headed, 'The Mails, Southampton,' a name caught his eye.

"Hollo, mother, that's him, I take it!"

"Who, Keane ?"

"E. Locksley, Esq., Company's Europeans."

"Your cousin, Ned ? Well, what about him ?"

"Sailed, or rather steamed, for Alexandria in the 'Cleopatra,' on the 7th."

"Poor Lucy."

"Well, what's the matter with her?"

"To part from an only son must be very sad,
Keane."

"Perhaps it ain't pleasant. What a rage old
Locksley must be in with him!"

"What for ; for leaving them?"

"Maybe for that a little; but still more for
chucking such a chance away."

"What chance?"

"The same his father has had, this score of years
and more—the fingering of the Cransdale agency.
I dare say Ned knows, or thinks he knows, the old
'un has feathered his nest pretty well. Still, 'a
fellow must be a fool to turn out of such clover in
search of a liver complaint."

"Perhaps he is ambitious."

"Ambitious of what? How high does he think
to climb? There's no ladder so tall as that with
golden rungs. However, if he's a fool I'm not, so
you'll be so good as to write a sympathising letter
to Aunt Lucy on your part; and say something
neatly civil and regretful on mine."

"On yours, Keane? What do you care about
his going or staying?"

"A good deal, to be sure. Do you think I have
no family affections, ma'am?"

She would have found it hard to answer such a

question honestly, at least in regard of herself, in whose person his whole home family lay.

That he was more selfish in respect of her than she in respect of him, was scarcely questionable. Yet, in one sense, it was less evident to her than to others. What unselfishness she knew, was special and limited in its kind and object. Her motherhood had taught it her; but only in respect of him on whom she had lavished a certain inconsiderate maternal idolatry. She was reasonable enough not to think it so very strange that he should be towards herself, what she herself was towards others except him. That the possessor of power should use it as an irresponsible possession, seemed to her quite natural; and as her son came gradually into possession of his, she was not astonished at having to feel its pressure. But love craves love, and, spite of reason, expects return in kind, whatever the degree may be. So it troubled her sometimes to think of what kind might be the more or less of feeling her son might have for her. She certainly could not call him undutiful in one main respect. That aversion from pursuit of business, which had once seemed to be the most threatening cloud on the horizon of her motherly hopes, had disappeared. He was assiduous and eager at his office work. Old business connections of his father's, who had

never withdrawn all dealings from the firm, but had, perhaps, diminished them, talked of a time when they should put themselves and their affairs entirely into its hands again. They prophesied that within those office walls the portent would be seen for once of "an old head upon young shoulders." They would congratulate Mrs. Burkitt with such heartiness as their natures allowed, upon the "really remarkable steadiness of her son, and his aptitude for affairs." The first flavour of such congratulations had, indeed, some sweetness; but such as soon cloyed the palate of her soul. An aftersmack of bitterness succeeded it. Sometimes she felt almost disgust at the full satisfaction of her most anxious wishes. She was no frequent reader of the Psalms, nor given to much devotional meditation thereupon, yet one verse, when read out at church upon a Sunday, would fall heavy on her heart, as that of which she had her own experience: "He gave them their heart's desire: and sent lean-ness withal into their souls."

"I'll tell you what it is, mother," resumed young Burkitt, after another spell at his paper; "when you write to Aunt Lucy, you must invite her down here again. A little change of air and scene is just the thing, if she's out of sorts about Ned's going from her. Besides which, it would be pleasant

company for you, as you are a good deal alone in my office hours."

She looked up at him quickly, as if to assure herself that indeed there was a thought, if only an after thought, for her. Keane met her look with a very gracious one. He was anxious that his aunt should be invited, and that his mother should so give the invitation as to make its acceptance probable.

Poor hungry heart! Grateful for this graciousness, she replied,

"I think we must let a few days pass first, Keane, and then invite her. But perhaps it would be as well to write and condole at once."

"As you please, dear; only mind you manage to make her come, and old Locksley into the bargain, eh?"

No artifice was needful on Mrs. Burkitt's part to colour her letter with semblance of true sympathy. Her son stayed, whereas Lucy's was gone; yet she could feel for a mother who should lose her heart's darling. There are more manners of loss than one. Sometimes, keeping and losing are notions which get confused. Lucy was touched by her sister-in-law's evident sincerity. When, after a few days, the second letter came to invite her, she hailed the invitation as a relief; all the

more gratefully that Lady Cransdale and her daughter were returning to the House. She had little inclination as yet for their society; and her husband was still in London upon legal business of the estate.

Her nephew himself wrote, upon her acceptance of his mother's invitation, offering, in the most considerate manner, since his uncle was not at home, to come over to Cransdale and escort her to Freshet, should she be in any way nervous or apprehensive at undertaking the journey alone. This was not to be thought of; but it made a favourable impression upon his aunt, and a deeper one, for her sake, upon Robert Locksley, when apprised of it.

Nothing could be in better taste and keeping than Keane's conduct during his aunt's stay with them. There was an unobtrusive sympathy and deference in his manner towards herself, that was very pleasing. His bearing also, in her presence, towards his own mother, was a more delicate and tasteful compliment to her maternal character, so nicely blended were filial affection and respect. He was anxious to discover, amongst other things, what effect his cousin's breaking off from old plans and home ties might have had upon Mrs. Locksley's maternal feelings, whether their wound chafed as

well as ached; but he had the wit to divine that the probe must be used with very tender and skilful hand.

One day he thought the opportunity was given to say without offence :

"How could Ned have found it in his heart to leave you both?"

"He didn't," answered Lucy, firing up even quicker than he had thought it possible.

His eyes alone asked further explanation.

"I found it in *my* heart? that is, *we* found it in *ours*, his father and I."

"Ah! that accounts for it," said he, dexterously. "I felt, from what little I had seen of Ned, that his heart must be loving as well as brave."

"That is very true, Keane. His is a noble spirit. Too much so for the quiet homely life we had intended. He would have been thrown away at Cransdale; though it's a kind of treason to my own dear husband to say so. He will make a fine soldier."

"That he will. Do you know, though it seems presumptuous to say so, I really believe I know more than even you can of his bravery?"

"No, really. Do tell me what you mean?" asked Ned's mother, excited and eager for some fresh token of her son's great heart.

" You will wonder that you never heard of it before, as you must have done, had not Ned's modesty been in excess even of his generous boldness. I scarcely know now whether I am not breaking, unjustifiably, a seal of secrecy."

" But I am discreet, though a woman, and a fond mother, into the bargain."

She was so afraid of losing the precious token after all. So Keane told her of their adventure with the puffin. His calculation was profoundly just. She took him to her own heart readily, as that for which her son had freely risked his priceless life. She took him to her more readily than if he had been the saver, not the saved. To have owed Ned's life to any but his Maker, his own father, and herself, might perhaps have brought that restless sense of debt which ends by rousing debtor against creditor. Who knows down what a steep such temptation may not dash the soul ?

Henceforward, Lucy's eyes were spell-bound when they looked upon her nephew. There was the prize for which her own great-hearted boy had plunged into the treacherous deep—which he had brought out safe. In her sight it was luminous, as if with phosphorescent lights out of the sea waters. She could no longer judge Keane truly through the mist of generous prejudice which glorified him. It

is an ill wind that blows no one good. That which brought Robert Locksley to Freshet to rejoin his wife, blew good on this wise to a certain poor client of Keane's. The man, by name Job Sanger, had contrived, not without faults as well as blunders, to get "into difficulties." He was a small freeholder, who not content with cultivating his own freehold to moderate advantage, as his fathers had done before him, must needs enter as tenant upon a larger farm adjoining his paternal acres. The mischief was, that to raise any capital for the undertaking, he was forced to mortgage heavily his own inheritance. A thoroughly foolish act; for the amount so raised was far below what might have justified him, on sound commercial grounds, in entering upon the wider field, off which his best and wisest friends all warned him. The "difficulties" came neither sooner nor later than might have been expected; but a more serious mischief arose from Job's peculiar way of attempting to meet them. With the vicious cunning of a fool, he contrived to raise a second, and this time, fraudulent mortgage on his own land, the proceeds of which did as little for the success of his tenant farming, as those of his honest folly had done before. Both transactions had become known in course of time to Burkitt and Goring, omniscient, as it sometimes appeared to the

neighbourhood, in all such matters, round about the town of Freshet. The young head of that old firm was, for reasons of his own, desirous of obtaining some footing as landed proprietor in the county, no matter on how small a scale. Job Sanger's mortgages seemed to offer an opportunity. He bought them both on advantageous terms from their respective holders; and Job, once freeholder, became, of course, Keane's thrall. The first exercise of his new lord's power over him, which Job thought cruel and arbitrary, was truly both judicious and kind, although dictated by no special tenderness for him. Keane had business relations with a substantial man hankering after the very farm which Job occupied as tenant, and to the occupation of which he still clung with all the obstinacy of a knavish muddle-pate. Keane, oiling his transactions with the man of substance by promise of the coveted holding, signified to Job his will and pleasure that it should at once be vacated—being helpless, he obeyed.

Wretched Job, unable to find, as his great patriarchal namesake, motives to patience in consciousness of his own integrity, withdrew into his original snail-shell, there to live in continual dread, not only of foreclosure, which should leave him lackland, homeless, and penniless; but likewise of exposure

and indefinite punishments, wherewith Keane would amuse himself, by darkly threatening him now and then. Once a fortnight, on every "Great-Tuesday's market," as it was called at Freshet, he was required to put in appearance at the office; sometimes merely to be sent about his business curtly by a clerk; sometimes to be ushered into Mr. Burkitt's own inner room, there to endure sneers at his folly, reproaches for his knavery, or, if Keane were in savage humour, threats of impending and total ruin. Not seldom he wished the catastrophe come.

"I couldn't be well wuss ruined nor now; and I shuldn't be so plaguy worritted!"

The catastrophe came; but, luckily for him, in the presence of Robert Locksley.

It was on a "Great-market" as usual. Keane, not without cause, was full of suppressed ill temper. First and foremost, on his way down from home to the office he had encountered Mr. Davenant, owner of the schooner-yacht 'Ocean Queen,' who informed him, with polite expressions of regret, that, in bringing her to moorings last night, he had unfortunately fouled the 'Lady Constance,' Keane's pet sailing-boat, carried away her sprit, and damaged her bows. Mr. Davenant was a client, a wealthy man, the father of certain Miss Davenants, leaders of fashion in Freshet, in whose eyes Keane wished

to stand well. There was no help for it but to utter civilities in place of the rising execrations in his throat. Arrived at the office, he found among his letters one announcing the miscarriage of an affair, not only important, but too confidential to allow even of an exclamation in presence of the clerks. So he went into his own room, and banged the door. An unfortunate ebullition, which shook down from a lofty bookcase a plaster bust of Lord Eldon in his wig, shattering it upon the floor. Hardly were the fragments collected, and swept out by the errand boy, when Job Sanger, twirling his broad-brimmed, but now napless beaver, knocked at the door. Luckless Job! The "come in" was pitched in a key which, like the overture to an opera of the school of horrors, gave promise of tragedy to follow. He was too much upset to close the door after him as he obeyed the summons; unless, indeed, prophetic presence of mind had whispered how advisable it might prove to secure an open way of retreat.

"How long, sir, am I to tolerate this sort of thing?"

Well might Job wonder within himself what sort of thing was intended, and of what kind Mr. Burkitt's notions of toleration might be. But all his

answer was, as he smoothed with his left coat-sleeve what had been the nap of his beaver :

“Hope no offence, Mr. Burkitt, sir!”

“No offence, indeed, you swindling sawney! Putting off a parcel of worthless mortgages upon me, doing one out of more money than twice your cabbage garden’s worth!”

There was double poetic licence in this eloquent outburst, transfer of identity and amplification of amount. Mr. Keane Burkitt was the last man upon whose hands Job would willingly have put off his mortgages, worthless or otherwise; and the “consideration” for which they had found their way into that practitioner’s hands did not, perhaps, actually reach twice the value of the fee simple.

“Mr. Burkitt, sir, it aint a bit o’ use denyin’ as I’ve ‘ad my misfortins, which I’m sure as I’m ashamed to illconveniencce any genelman as you. But I ’opes you wont’ be ‘ard upon a man as is down, sir.”

“‘A man as is *down*,’ eh?” sneered Keane; “one as ought to be *up* instead, before the Freshet bench of magistrates to answer for his plain dealing, eh?”

“Bother the bench!” muttered the culprit, restive at last; “thay culdn’t ‘ave a chap up onst a fartnight any’ows.”

“So Mr. Sanger; I’ve seen you sulky before, but

never saucy till now," said his tormentor, with a savage grin. "I'll spare you the trouble of these fortnightly calls in future. What's to-day? Tuesday the 17th. Ah! very well; this day week will be the 24th. You will be good enough to have paid in to Messrs. Burkitt and Goring's account on or before that date the amount of both mortgages, with all arrears of interest due upon them, or you take the consequences and I the freehold."

"Now, dont'ee, Mr. Burkitt, sir, dont'ee! Me and mine 'as 'eld that fre'old this two 'undred year and more, as I've 'eard say."

"All the more reason some one should hold it now that will make better use of it."

"Aint you never no mussy, then, Mr. Burkitt, sir?" said Job, in piteous accents.

"Mercy my good Job! Indeed, I have; this would be a poor world without it. If I thought I was really doing you any kindness by granting longer delay you should not have to ask twice for it."

Keane spoke loud and free, not in his usual dry noiseless manner when saying unpleasant things; so that Job stared, and marvelled what new shape the spirit of persecution was assuming.

"Nothing could have been farther from my wish all along, than 'to drive you into a corner,' as they say, my good man. I have too much regard for

your wife and family for that. If I have seemed to press heavily at first upon you, it has been simply to bring home the lesson to you, that honesty is the best policy after all."

Job actually gaped upon him.

"Here, Uncle Robert," cried Keane, crossing the room from the mantel-piece, against which he had been leaning to the open door, which he opened wider still: "do come in here a few minutes, will you, and help me with a matter that's as much in your way as mine."

"You here, Keane! I thought you said you were to drive over to Lanercost; I just looked in to ask a question of Mr. Goring about a man whose name I can't find in the law list."

"Well, here's mine, we can look over. I saw you come in, as the door was ajar; give me a bit of advice, since you are come. I don't go to Lanercost till after lunch."

So Robert Locksley came into his nephew's private room; and the door of that sanctum was duly shut now, and Job, in utter bewilderment, was requested to take a chair, whilst Keane, with mingled severity and consideration, explained to him that he was taking his uncle into confidence upon the state of his—Job's—territorial and financial affairs, because no one had more experience than

Mr. Locksley, manager of the great Cransdale estates, in the science of blending mercy with justice on a matter of the kind.

Mr. Locksley went into it at once with interest and attention. It certainly was not complicated; yet he was much struck, in Keane's exposition, by the way in which, without harshness or affected reserve, he contrived to put Job Sanger's conduct into the clearest "dry light," so to speak. His nephew had, apparently, the dispassionate judgment indispensable to the man of business, who must act without prejudice between lord and tenant.

"The mortgages, however, are both in my hands, uncle, now; and as I was saying to Sanger just as you came in, all I want is to keep him from shifts and trickeries, which not only will ruin his own character, but will take the bread out of a wife and children's mouths at last. What terms I am to give him, I leave entirely to you. As I am acting for myself, and not for a client, as I must do so often in these mortgage cases, any indulgence you think hopeful and reasonable I will gladly make."

Keane had truly said that the Cransdale administration, though studiously just, was largely tempered with mercy. Locksley's award sent Job homewards from that fortnightly market with a lighter heart than he had owned for some time,

though the puzzle in his brain was in a tangle still.

"What can a come to 'un?" he mused, as he drove out his tax-cart from Freshet in the afternoon; "he's a deep 'un for sartain, and a 'ard 'un pretty sure; yet them's fairish terms considerin', them is!"

The Lanercost road ran parallel to Job's road home for many hundred yards beyond the turnpike-gate; but even had Keane Burkitt thought aloud, as his neat dog-cart bowled along, it was too far off for Job to have heard him say, "My sprat's gone for bait; I wonder will it hook a mackarel."

Though his hand was light enough upon the reins, Keane drove with a sharpish bit; and when he met the Davenant girls returning from a ride some mile or two out of the town, he had his horse upon his haunches spite of his full swinging trot, the instant he perceived that they were half-inclined to pull up and speak to him.

"Oh, Mr. Burkitt, we are so sorry for 'the Lady Constance,'" said the younger, whose manner was always freer with him than her sister's. "Is she much damaged? It was so dark that evening, when we ran aboard of her, that we could hardly see."

"Were you on board the 'Ocean Queen,' then, when she fouled her?"

"Yes, both of us; we had been sailing to the Skerry with papa."

"Then I am consoled already, whatever damage may be done the 'Lady Constance,' since you suffered none."

"Very polite!" said Sophy Davenant. But Keane's eyes were on her sister Fanny, who sat straight and silent on horseback, with a kind of proud self-possession.

"Anyhow," resumed the younger girl, "we are all very sorry, and wish we could make amends."

"That might be done at once, if there were any that needed making."

"How so, pray?"

"No, never mind," said Keane.

"But you are bound to tell us after such a hint. Don't you think so, Fanny?"

She, apparently, had not heard the question. At least she took no notice of it.

"Are you in a reverie, Fan?" She made a playful cut at her sister with her switch, which touched the horse's flank, and made him rear. Quick as thought Keane was out of his dog-cart, and at his head. But he had tact enough not to grasp the reins till he should see whether she were mistress of him without assistance. This pleased Fanny Davenant, who piqued herself upon her skill on

horseback. She acquitted herself perfectly ; and to reward Keane's forbearance rather than his devotion, condescended to say, as she patted her quieted steed's neck—

“ What was that about making amends, Sophy ? ”

“ Oh, Mr. Burkitt said we might easily make amends for damaging the ‘Lady Constance’s’ bows—and his own heart perhaps,” she added maliciously.

“ I need not say, Miss Davenant, that your sister is falsifying the record.”

“ Never mind being so precise,” said Sophy, “ they were words to that effect ; and I said we were ready to make what amends we could. Name your terms, Mr. Burkitt, and don’t be exorbitant.”

“ I shall have to repaint the ‘Lady Constance’ as well as to refit her ; and I want to change the name.”

“ Change the name ! ” cried Sophy, laughingly ; “ that’s not very likely.”

“ Yes, but I do. It was a whim of my cousin’s Ned Locksley—who is gone for a Sepoy, you know —calling her the ‘Lady Constance.’ ”

Fanny looked at him, spite of herself, with one rapid, inquiring look. He noted it, but gave no more token of having done so than of the false statement he was making about the first naming of his boat.

"I have not the honour, as he had, of Lady Constance Cranleigh's acquaintance; and it looks like a piece of affectation to keep her name on the little craft."

"Well, but what have we to do with that, Mr. Burkitt, pray?" said Sophy. "You don't want leave from us to give your boat a new name."

"I do, though," looking full at Fanny. She coloured, and drew herself up in her saddle again, uneasy as to what he might say next. Sophy saw what was passing in her sister's mind, and she, too, felt awkward for a moment. Still she must rattle through, for it was plain that her sister would not.

"I suppose you want one of us to give her a new name for you. Say the 'Cuttle-fish.'"

"Inky!" said Keane, and shook his head. "I spill too much of that dark fluid when on shore, and couldn't bear to blacken the blue sea with it."

"The 'Cormorant.'"

"Name too near the nature of a lawyer, folks might say. No, ladies; I only want your leave to call my little craft 'The Sisters.'"

"I'm sure you've mine," cried Sophy; "but the name's not choice in Freshet. There's an oyster boat of Widow Skaite's of that name in the harbour, and a collier brig from Appleby."

..

"Thanks for a concession so graciously made," he answered, with a low bow of mock solemnity.

"But what says Miss Davenant? There are two sisters to the name, remember."

"I think, you might leave it the 'Lady Constance' still."

"But since I will not, you do not absolutely forbid the new name, Miss Davenant?"

"I hardly know by what right I should do so."

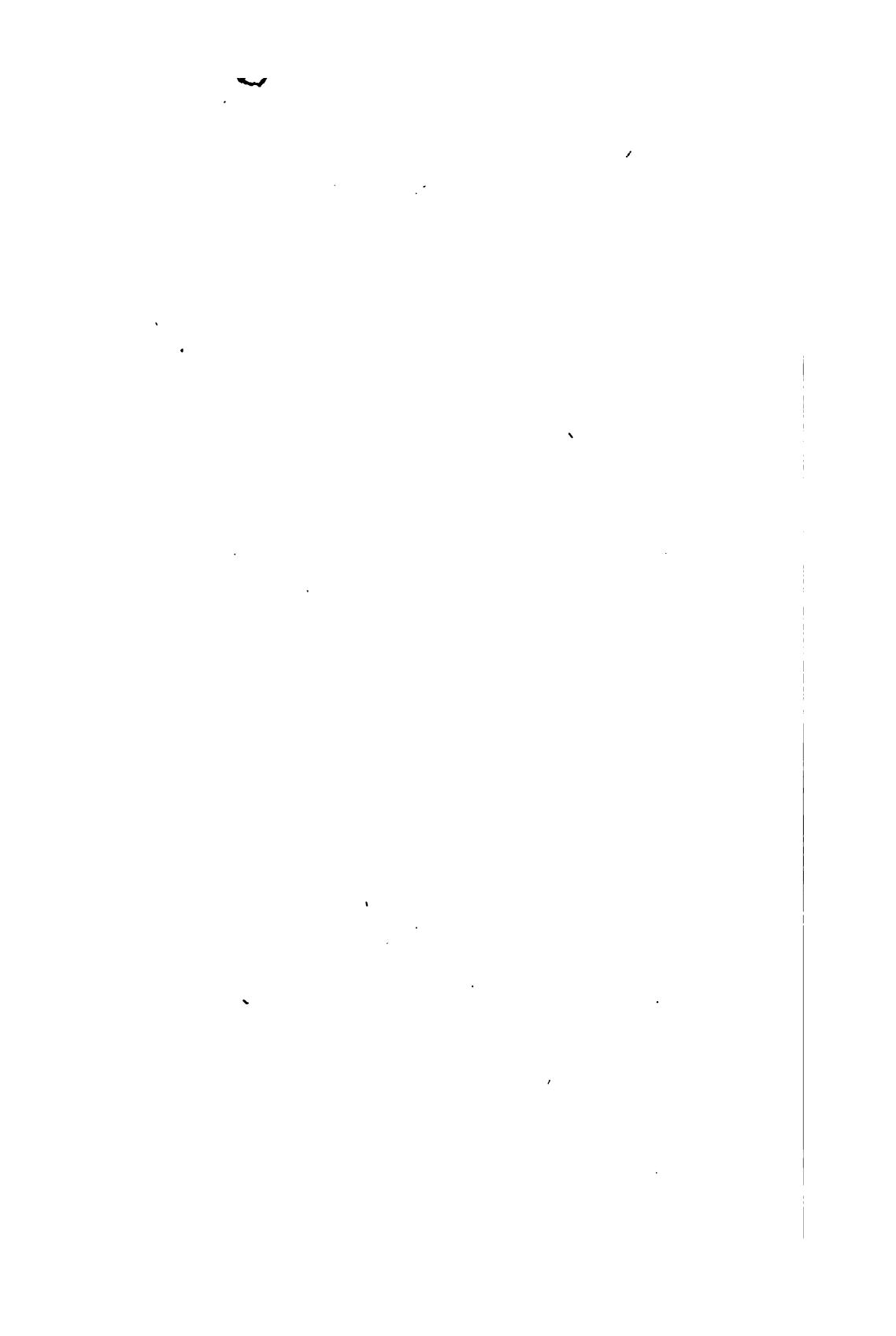
Keane made another bow, as solemn as the last, without its mockery.

The Davenant girls rode on. Keane, springing into his seat again, took the reins from his groom, and drove towards Lanercost.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:

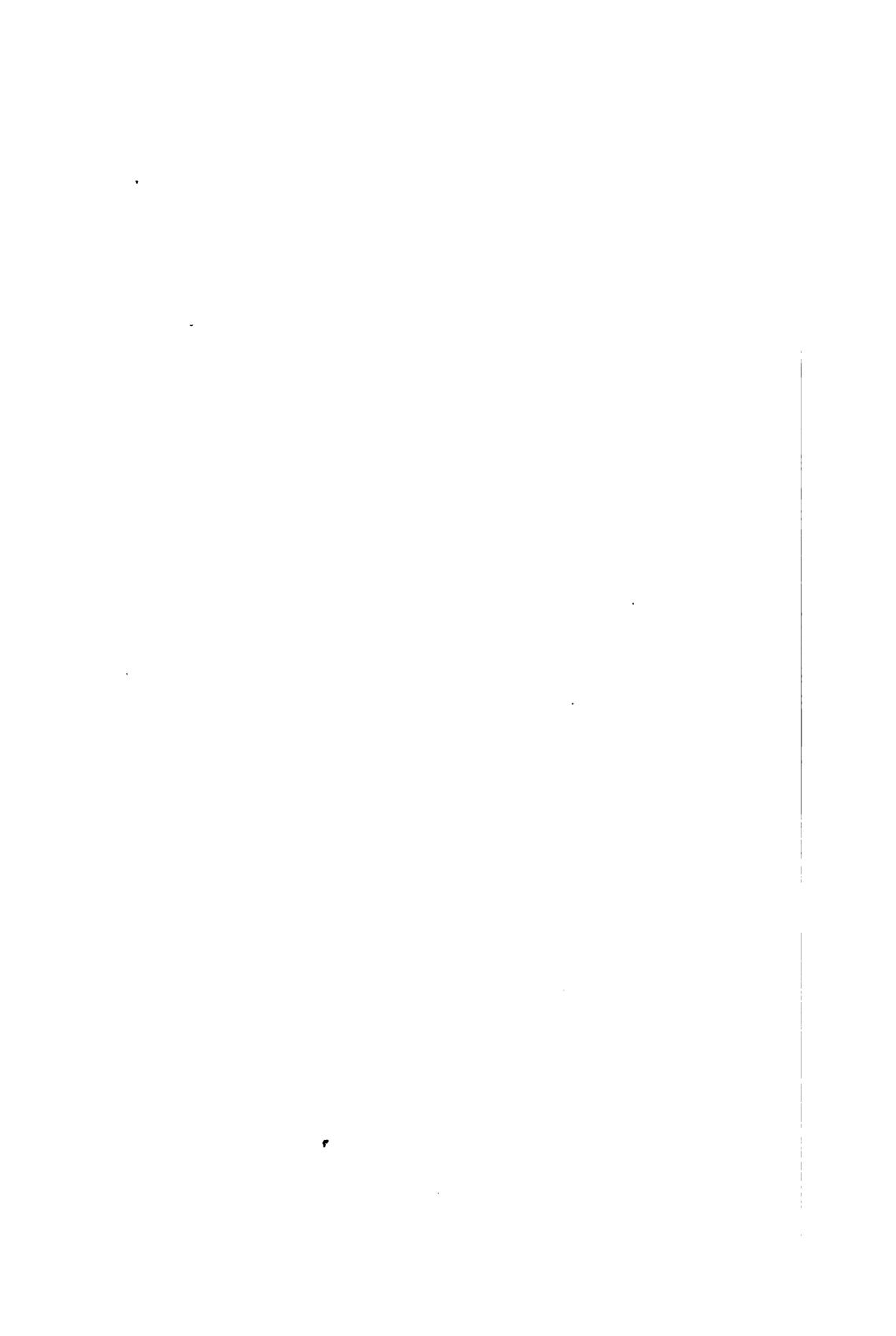
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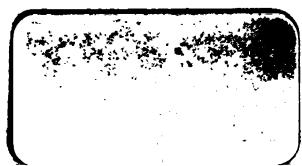


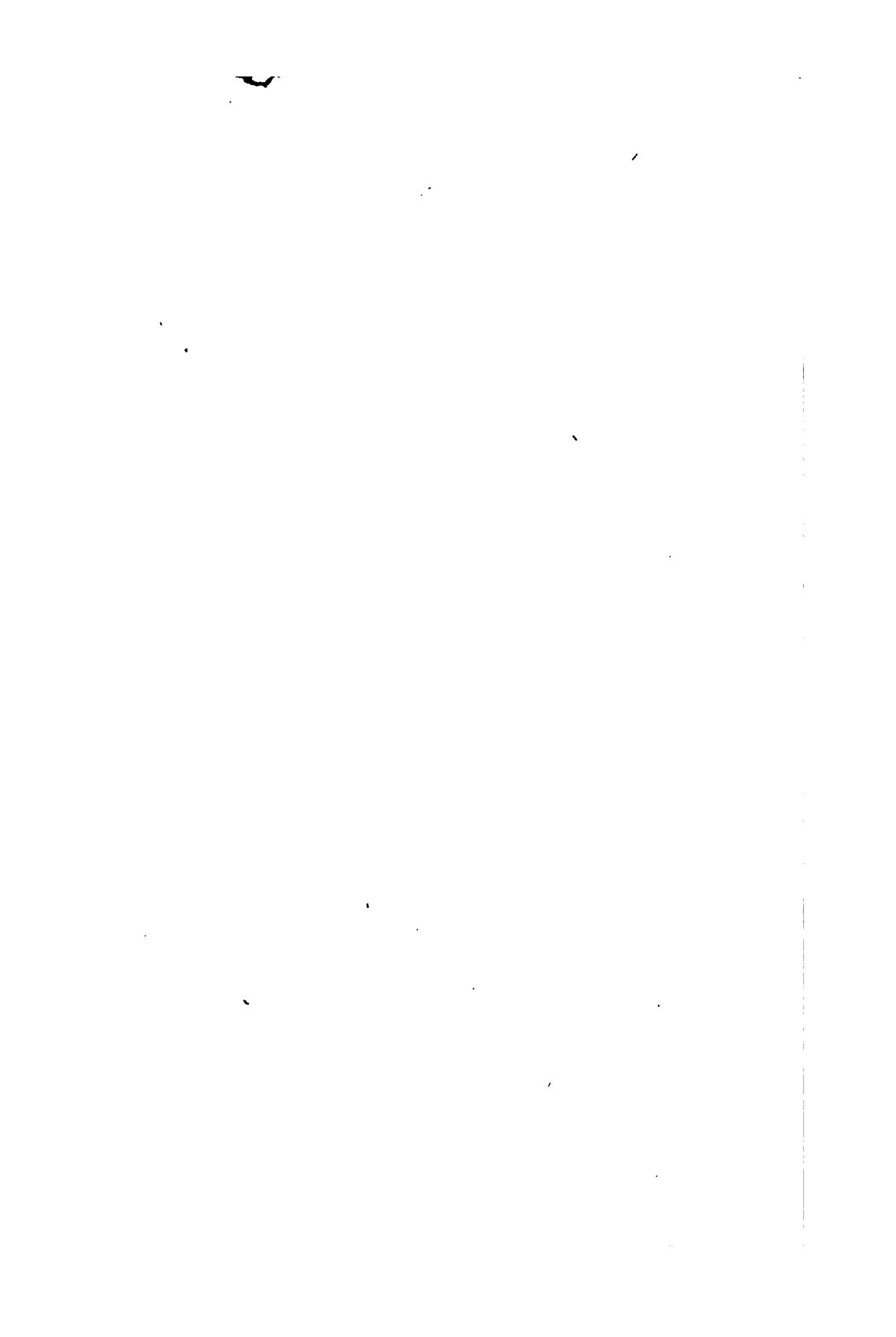


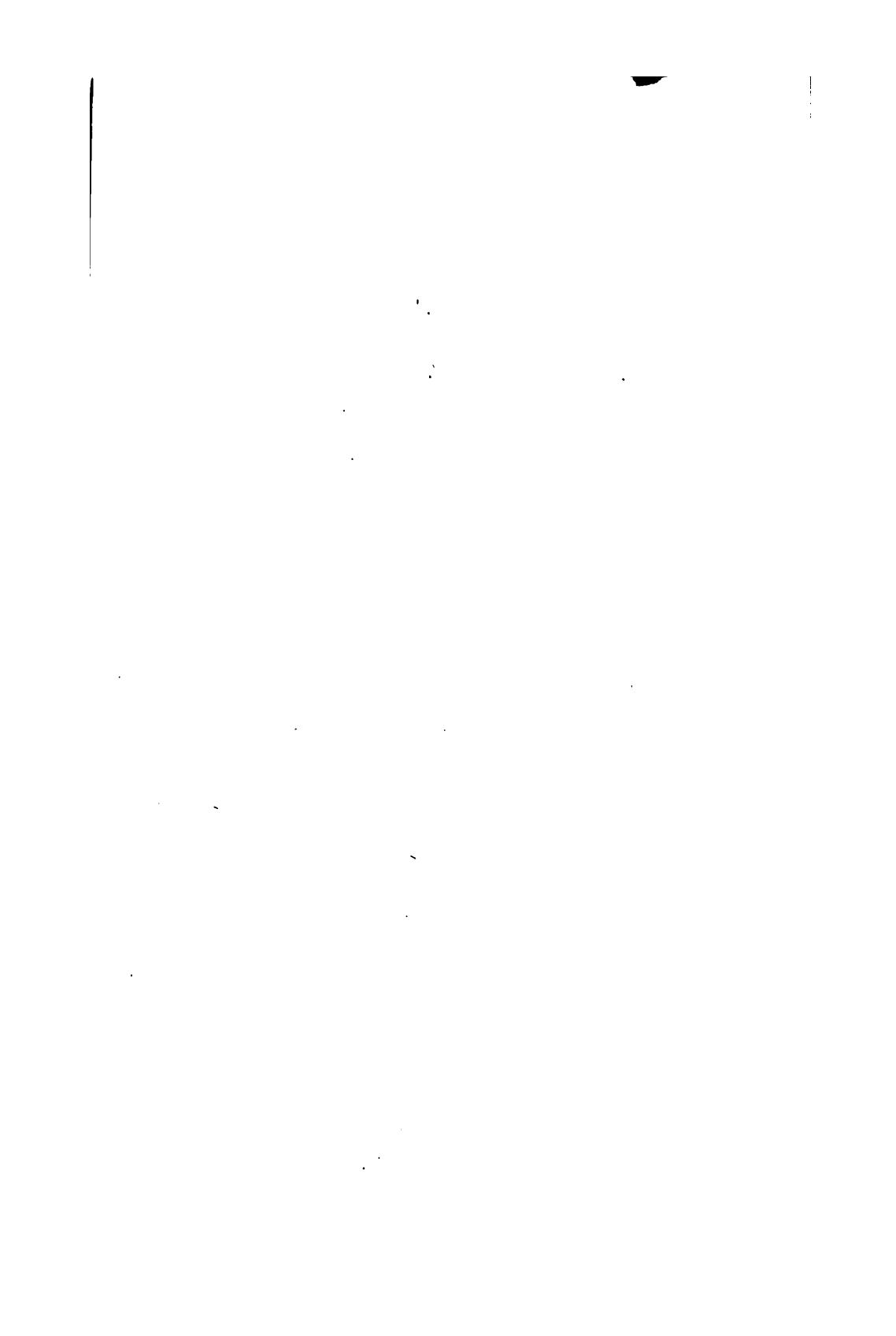


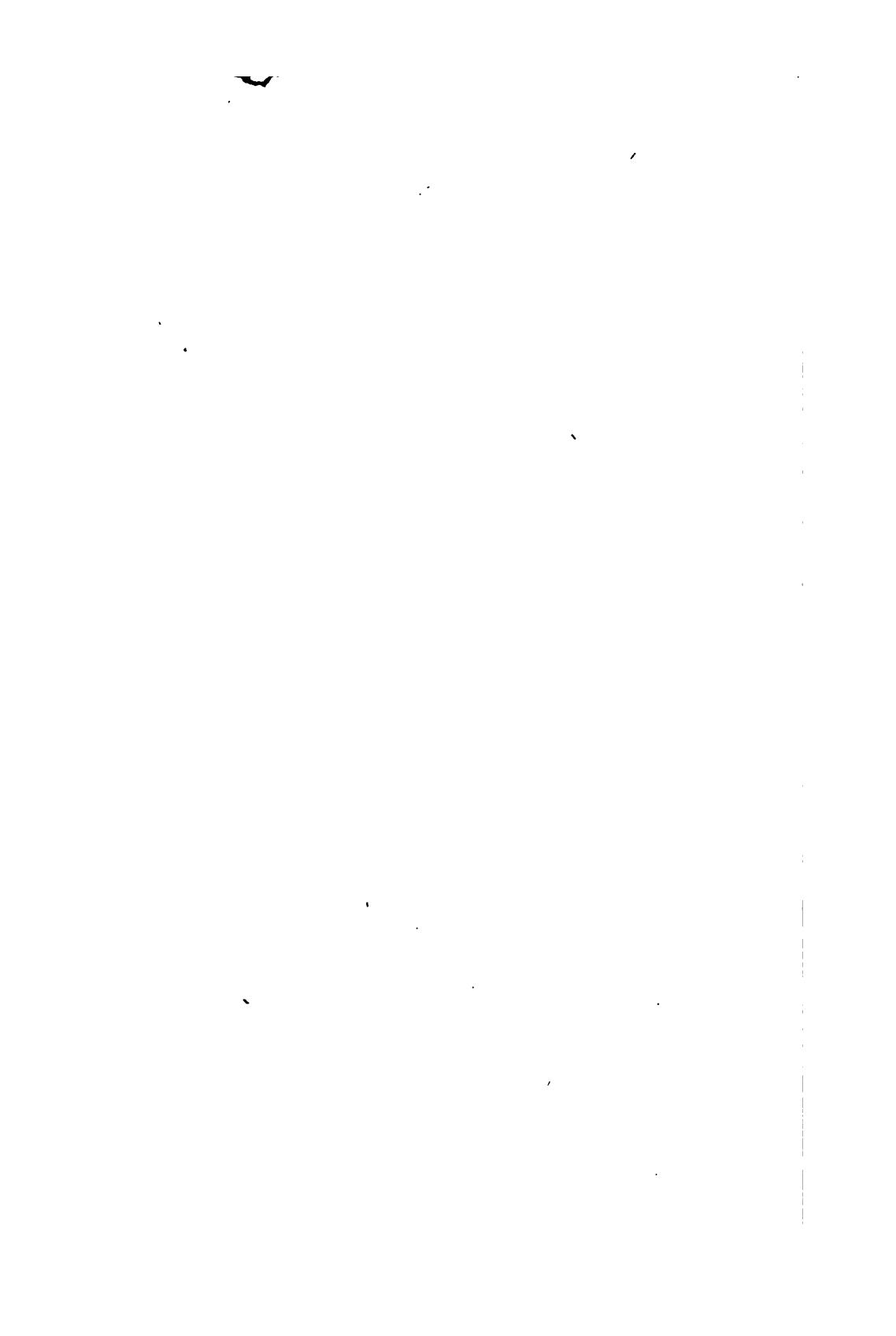






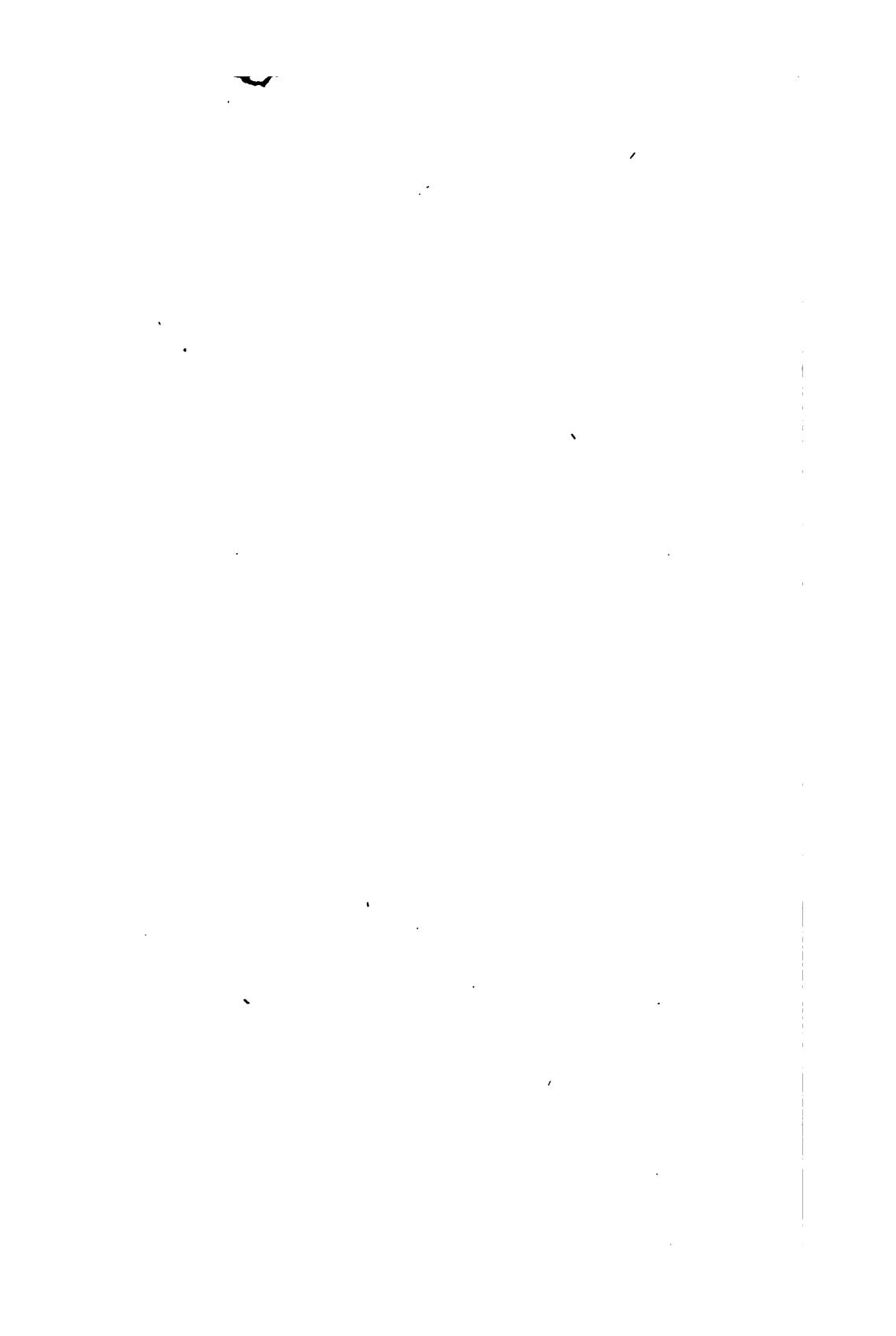


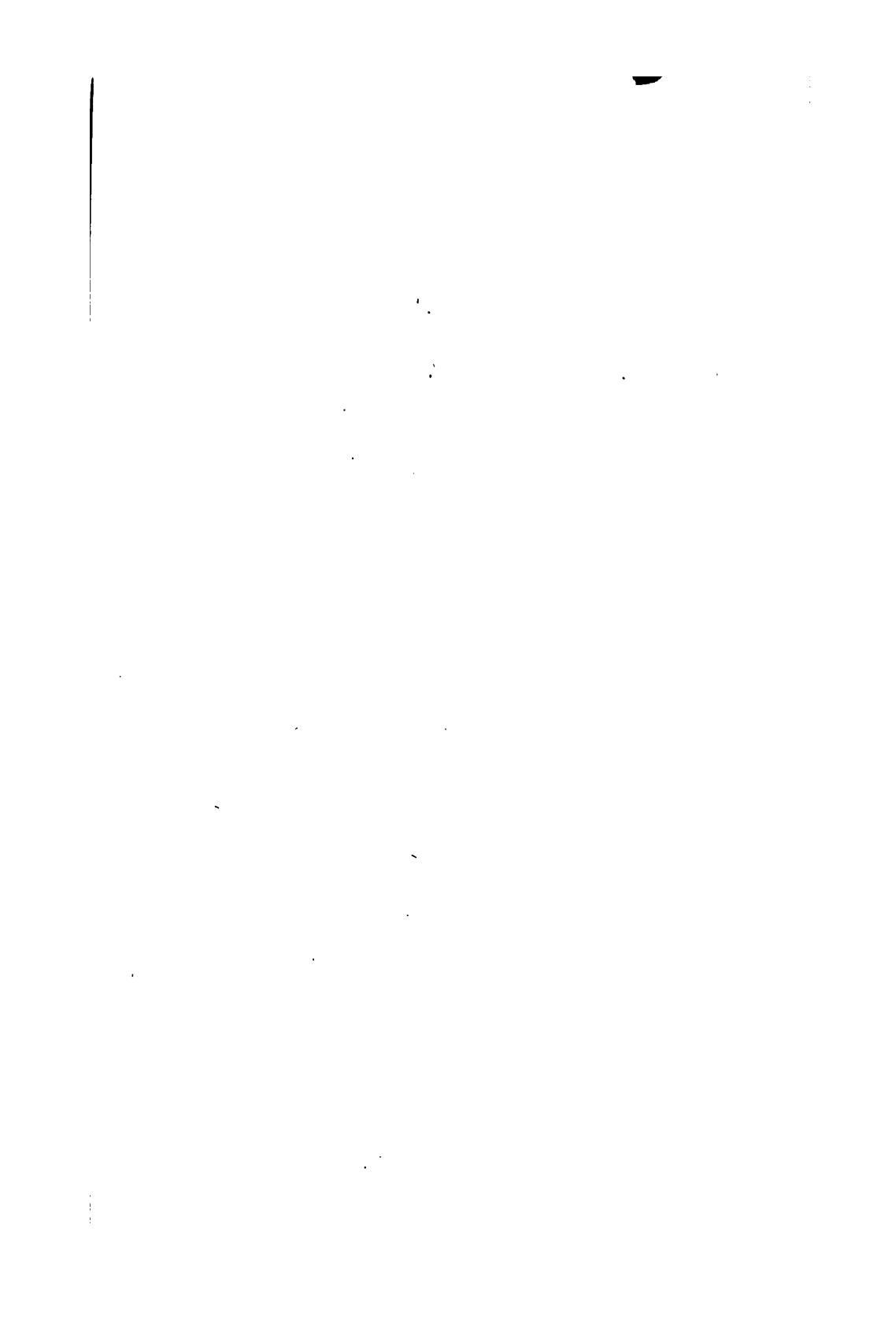


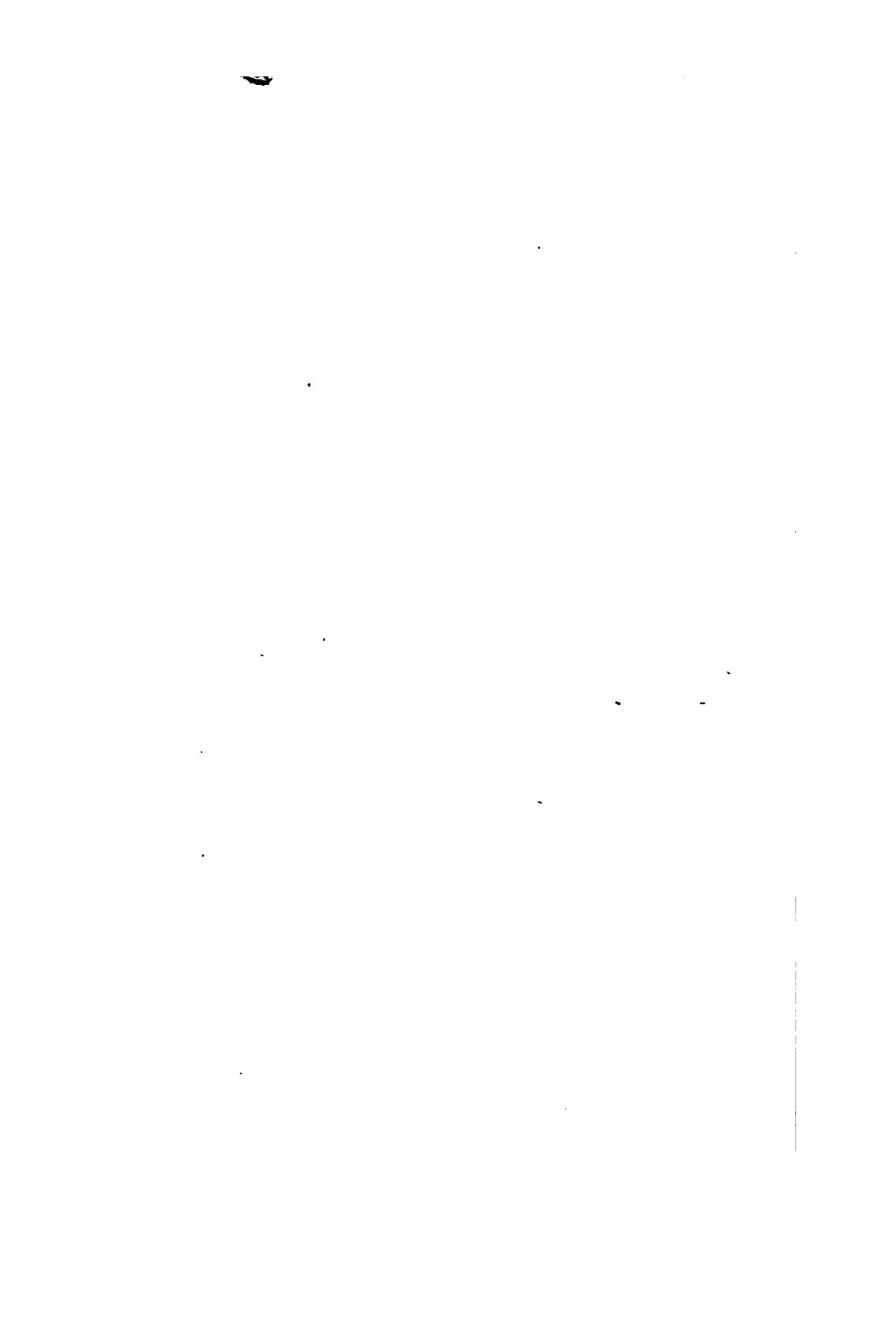


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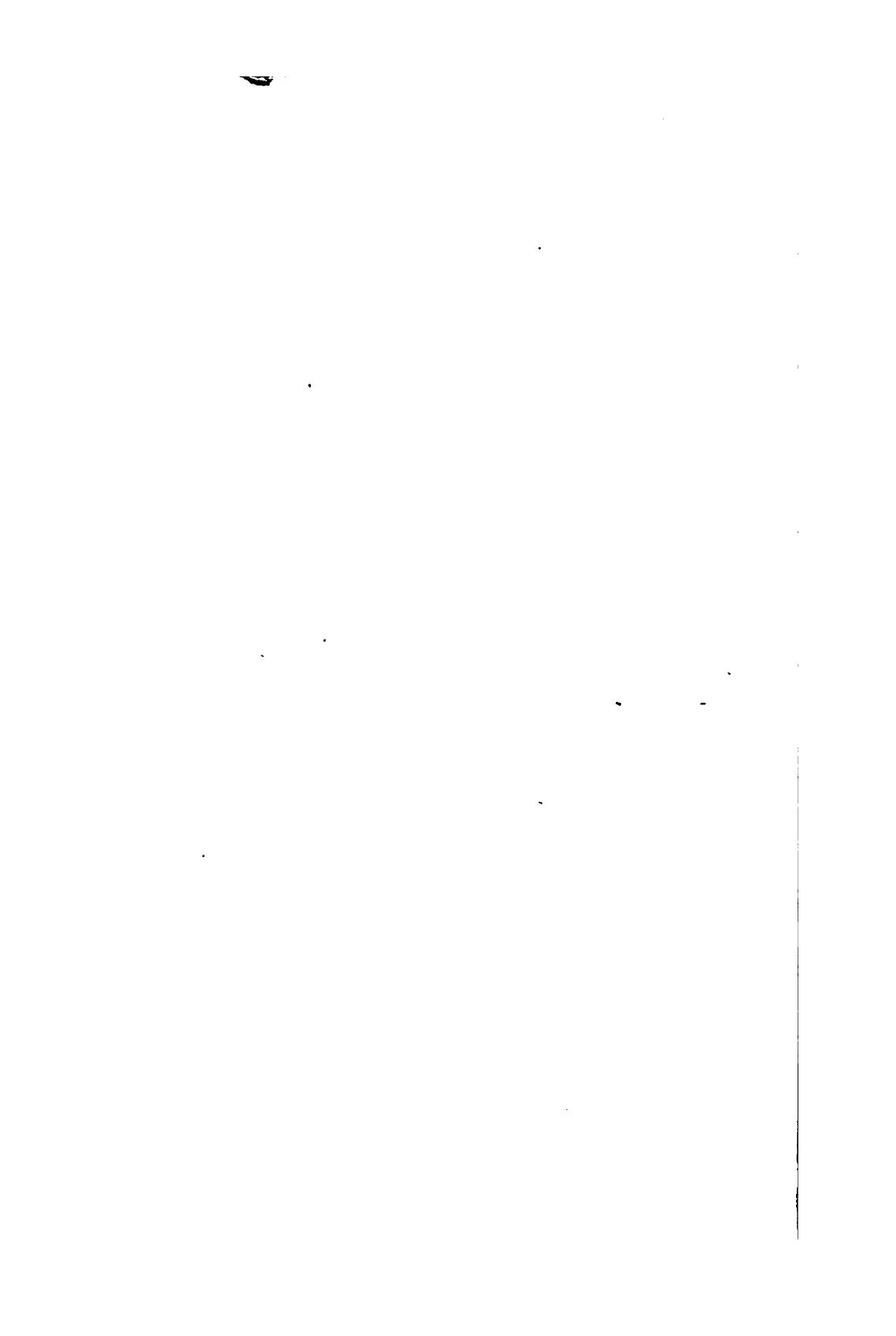
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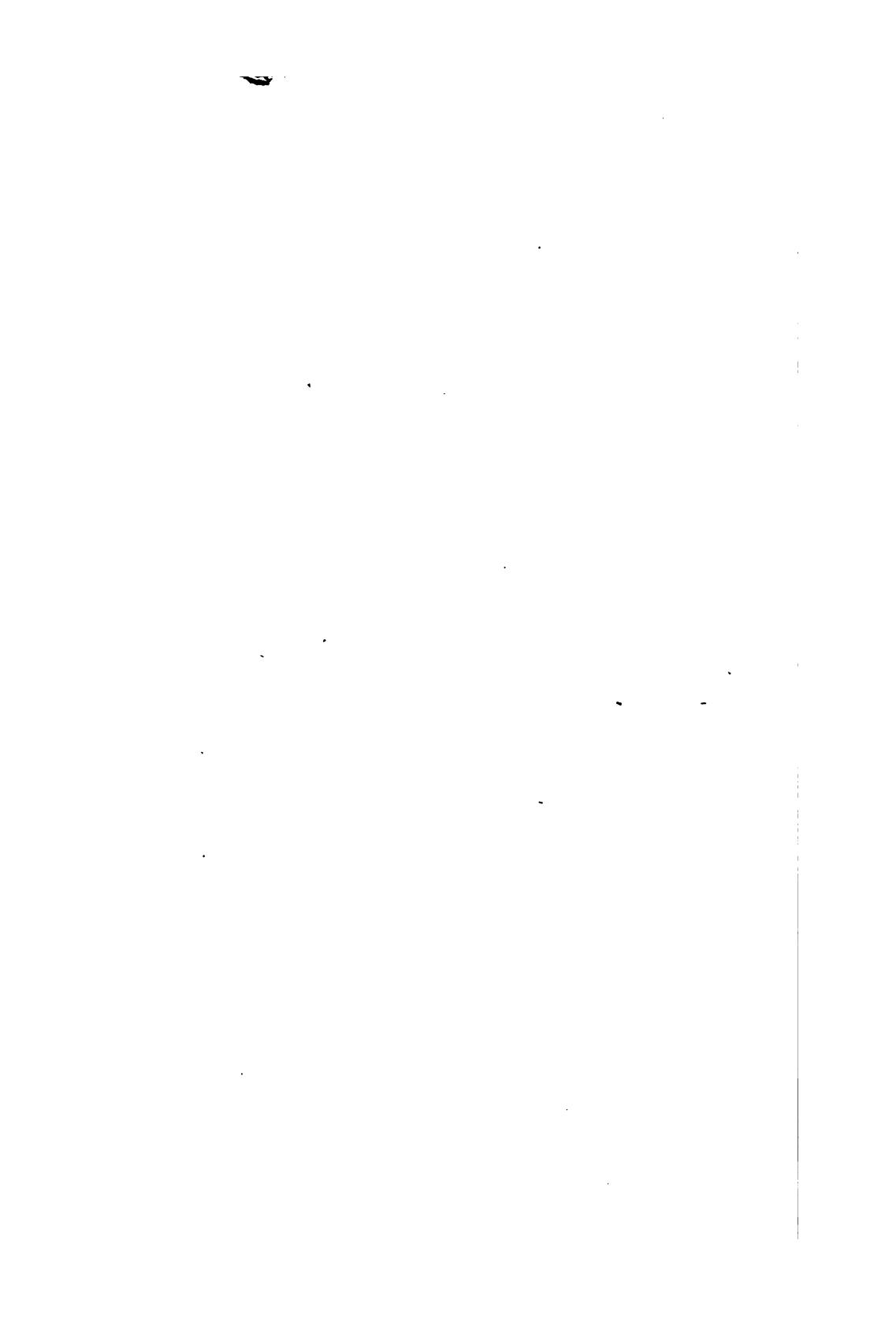
















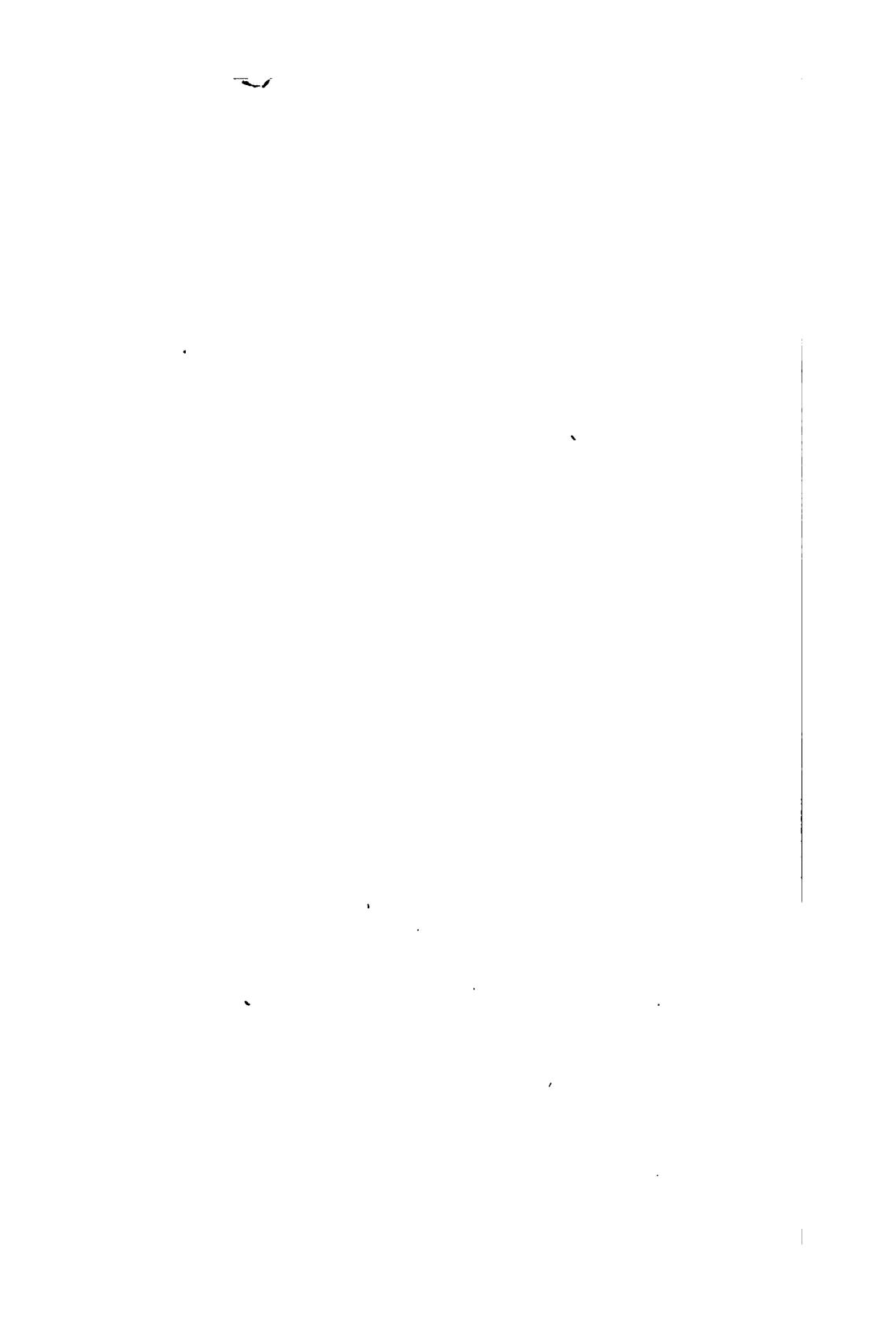


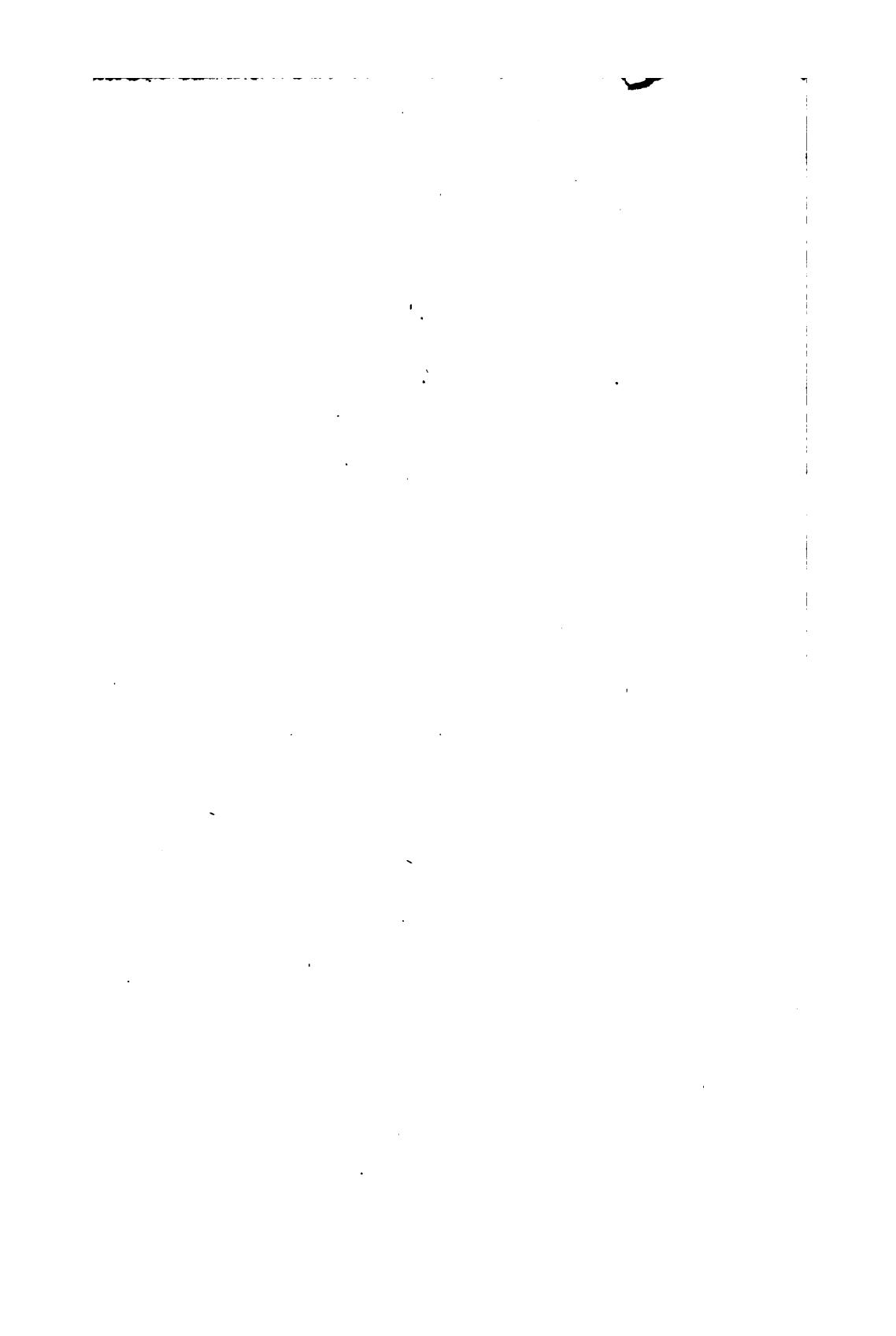


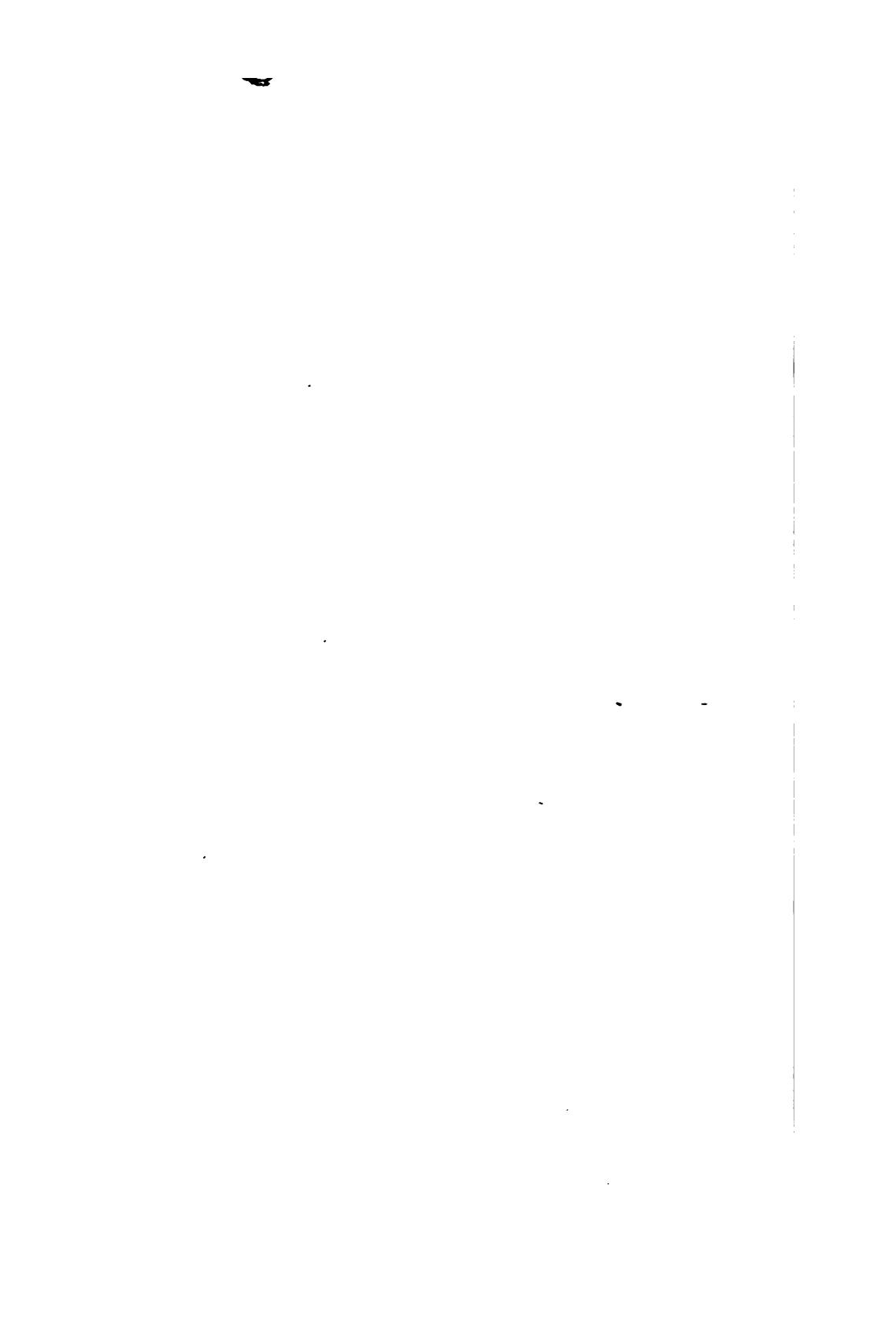


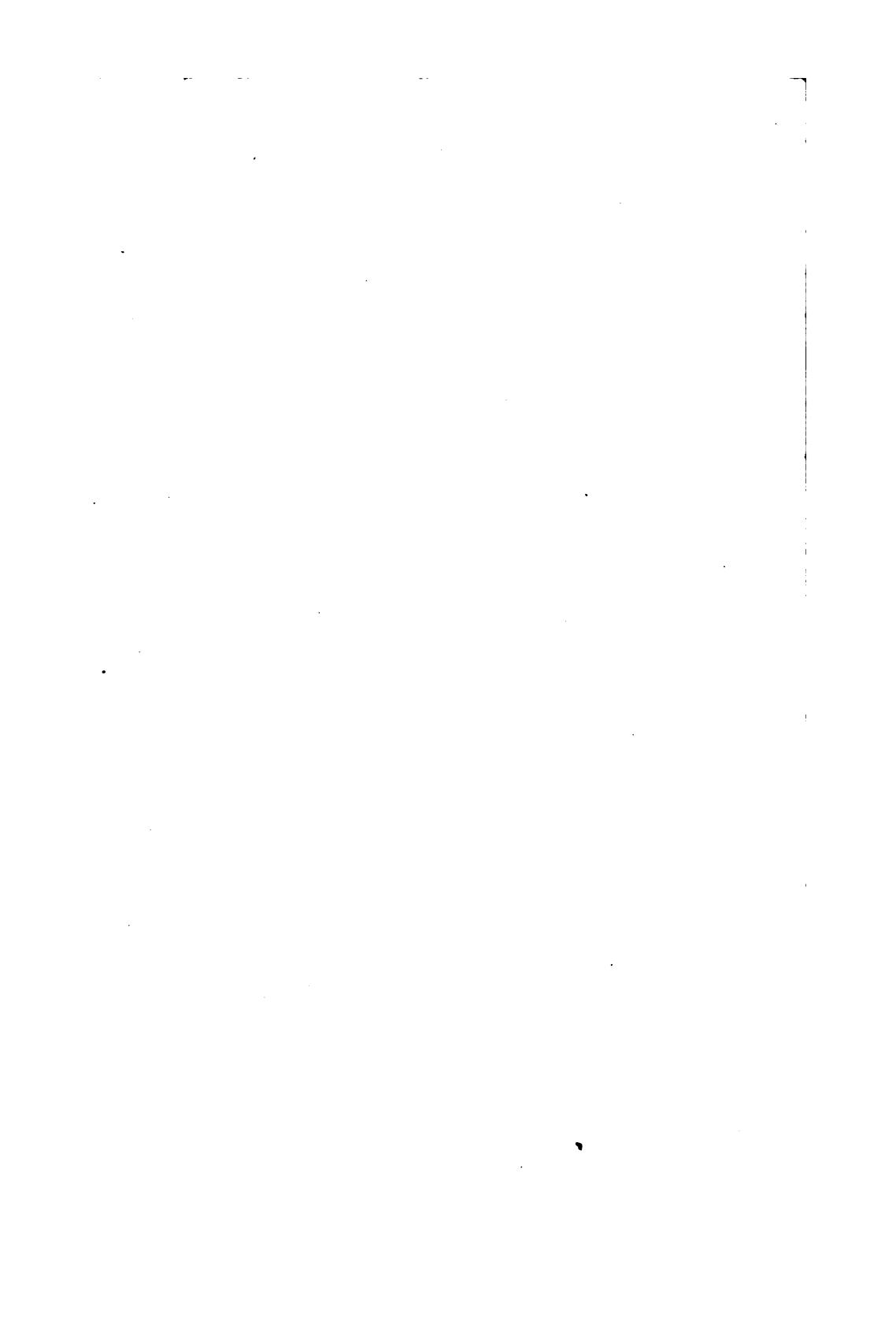














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